INTERNET/INTRANET SERVICES

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Handbook revises Department-wide procedures for the establishment and administration of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Internet/Intranet sites, and sites operating on behalf of VA, and non-VA entities contracted to operate for VA, and/or related services. This Handbook implements the policies contained in VA Directive 6102, Internet/Intranet Services.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES: This Handbook provides procedures relating to the establishment and administration of a VA Internet and/or Intranet site, and/or site operating on behalf of VA, and/or related service; it also provides procedures for publishing VA information on the World Wide Web (www). It defines the organizational responsibilities for all web activities that are related to posting, editing, maintaining, and removing files to or from the Internet and Intranet. Important modifications to this directive are the enhanced emphases on privacy-related issues, security requirements, accessibility requirements, the utilization of web applications and tools for enhanced performance and oversight and the establishment of the VA Chief Information Officer's (CIO's) Information Technology Operations (ITO) office as the entity which will have enforcement authority over all VA web activities. This Handbook also establishes that failure to comply with the requirements could result in serious consequences, including the removal of web pages and/or VA websites from publication.

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: VA Chief Information Officer's Information Technology Operations (ITO) office.

4. RELATED DIRECTIVES: VA Directive 6102, Internet/Intranet Services and VA Directive 6001, Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment Including Information Technology, VA Handbook 6300.1, Records Management Procedures ,VA Handbook 6300.5, Procedures for Establishing and Managing Privacy Act System of Records, and VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures.

5. RESCISSION: VA Handbook 6102, Internet/Intranet Services, dated March 15, 2001 and VA Handbook 6102/1, Internet/Intranet Services, dated October 24, 2001.

CERTIFIED BY:

[signature]

Robert N. McFarland
Assistant Secretary
for Information and Technology

BY DIRECTION OF THE
SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

[signature]

Robert N. McFarland
Assistant Secretary
for Information and Technology

Electronic Distribution Only

INTERNET/INTRANET SERVICES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERNET/INTRANET SERVICES

Chapter 1. OVERVIEW

1. PURPOSE

   a. This document outlines the guidelines that have been mandated by law and federal regulations and that have been adopted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with regard to the establishment and administration of VA Internet/Intranet sites and/or sites that operate on behalf of VA (e.g., non-VA entities contracted to operate for VA). It applies to all individuals designing, maintaining, and/or providing oversight to VA Internet and Intranet sites and sites operating on VA's behalf, including but not limited to, full time and part time employees, contractors, interns, and volunteers. This policy applies to all VA Internet/Intranet domains and servers that utilize VA resources on va.gov and on other domains which have received specific permission granted by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology to operate on a domain other than va.gov that operate on VA's behalf or with VA funding, including but not limited to, ".com, .edu, .mil, .net, .org," websites.

   b. VA promotes the secure and effective use of Internet services to improve access to and delivery of information to veterans, their families, and the general public; VA also promotes the secure and effective use of the Intranet to provide access to and delivery of information to VA employees. Information on the Internet/Intranet will include the policies, programs, activities, and objectives of VA. Internet services will also be used to obtain information from public and private organizations, consistent with applicable legal requirements. Internet and Intranet services will be used as a means of empowering employees in their work.

   c. Organizational use of Internet and Intranet services must reflect the mission of VA, and also must support VA goals and objectives. These services must support legitimate, mission-related activities of the VA and must be consistent with prudent operational, security, and privacy considerations. Organizational use of government office information technology (IT) (equipment, peripherals, etc.) should be consistent with the provisions of any applicable VA Directive.

   d. VA Internet and Intranet sites and sites operating on behalf of VA must be designed to support the widest range of potential users and computing platforms and must be compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

2. General Requirements of VA Websites

   a. A host of requirements and mandates have been identified in this Handbook and must be employed at all VA Internet and Intranet websites and sites operating on behalf of VA. In addition, this Handbook contains a Website Checklist that provides an itemized list of requirements for website compliance, along with a brief synopsis of each requirement and its application to the Internet and/or Intranet as appropriate. Additional Information on each item can be found by clicking on the applicable hyperlink, if any, displayed in the checklist for that item. References that provide information and links to other documents and websites with additional information can be found at http://www.firstgov.gov/webcontent/index.shtml.

b. The intent of this Handbook is to ensure a consistently high quality product recognizable as coming from VA, with a VA "look and feel", and which complies with all federal mandates and agency requirements. In addition to this Handbook, a separate document named the "VA Web Best Practices Guide" is also available to provide guidance to VA web managers. The VA Web Best Practices Guide should be used with this Handbook, and includes recommendations about technical, interface, branding, usability and content attributes of VA web pages and the use of electronic collaboration tools such as SharePoint and Groove. The VA Web Best Practices Guide can be found at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The Secretary has designated the Department's Chief Information Officer (CIO) as the senior agency official responsible for the Department's information technology (IT) programs.

b. Chief Information Officer. The Chief Information Officer (CIO) is responsible for the effective use of VA's Internet, Intranet and other IT resources, and for Department-wide directives, and policies governing the use and implementation of Internet, Intranet and other IT resources. The CIO shall:

(1) Establish policy and procedures for VA Internet and Intranet sites, including sites operated by non-VA entities for VA;

(2) Maintain liaisons with Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials, to ensure effective dissemination of VA information via the Internet and Intranet;

(3) Provide technical support consistent with existing CIO responsibilities;

(4) Review and approve additions and changes to Internet and Intranet policy and procedures as suggested by the VA Web Management Governance Board and the VA 6102 Advisory Board;

(5) Provide recommendations on Internet and Intranet services and risk management issues.

c. VA CIO Information Technology Operations (ITO), (Office of Information and Technology (005)). ITO shall support and manage VA's Internet and Intranet presence and ensure compliance with all federal mandates and guidance, and department-wide policies and requirements.

d. VA Web Management Governance Board. The VA Web Management Governance Board will include representatives from across VA; membership will be limited to VA staff only. This group shall:

(1) Make recommendations on the use of the Internet/Intranet and the associated web sites and services within the VA to the VA CIO;

(2) Provide advice, guidance and information to the VA 6102 Advisory Board as necessary and/or as requested by the VA 6102 Advisory Board;

(3) Meet quarterly at a minimum; more frequently at the direction of the CIO.

Provide advice, guidance and information to the VA 6102 Advisory Board as necessary and/or as requested by the VA 6102 Advisory Board.

e. VA 6102 Advisory Board. The VA 6102 Advisory Board will include staff members from across VA who provide web communications oversight to their respective organizations; membership will be limited to VA staff only. This group shall:

(1) Provide oversight to web activities within their respective organizations as established in this Handbook and as designated by their respective organizations;

(2) Meet monthly at a minimum; more frequently as needed to provide timely collaboration regarding emergent issues;

(3) Ensure the uniform application of the requirements, mandates and policies in this Handbook.

(4) Raise issues and request input and guidance from the VA Web Management Governance Board for issues beyond the scope of the VA 6102 Advisory Board.

f. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials. These officials will ensure the implementation of VA Internet and Intranet policies within their respective administrations and staff offices. These officials will also ensure that VA information and information resources are protected from unlawful and unauthorized use, access, tampering, destruction, and unauthorized release of sensitive information, which is defined as information that requires protection due to the risk and magnitude of loss or harm that could result from inadvertent or deliberate disclosure, alteration, or destruction of the information. The term includes information whose improper use or disclosure could adversely affect the ability of an agency to accomplish its mission, proprietary information, records about individuals requiring protection under the Privacy Act, and information not releasable under the Freedom of Information Act.

g. Program Office or Facility Site**.** The head of each Program Office or facility site (e.g., VBA Regional Office or Center, VHA facility such as a VA Medical Center, NCA facility such as a cemetery) with an official VA Internet/Intranet site shall:

(1) Be responsible for the content of the documents posted on the site (including papers, studies, forms, pictures, and graphics), ensuring that information posted on the identified Internet/Intranet site is current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA mission, and spell-checked and grammatically correct.

(2) Ensure that VA Internet and Intranet services conform to §508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended;

(3) Ensure that Internet and Intranet site server environments are secured as outlined in VA Handbook 6210, Automated Information Security Procedures, and/or will coordinate with

security personnel issues material to the server environments on which their respective sites reside.

(4) Each Program Office/organization with an official Internet and/or Intranet site will appoint a webmaster who provides technical management to maintain the website(s).

(5) Each Program Office/organization will designate a content manager for the website(s) who will be accountable for the information disseminated by a particular website that meets the mission of their respective program or organization.

(Note: While it is preferred that different people serve as webmaster(s) and content manager(s), these roles may be combined if appropriate.)

h. Webmasters and Content Managers: The webmaster is an Internet and/or Intranet service administrator who possesses the skills, knowledge and ability to work alone, or with a consortium of Information Technology (IT) professionals, to design, publish, and maintain websites that provide a variety of information services to the public and to VA employees. The webmaster provides technical management to maintain the website(s) and must be knowledgeable about the technical issues regarding the publishing of a web page, including navigation, branding, page formats, metatags, graphics and other attributes that provide the framework and corporate appearance for publishing content. The content manager must be knowledgeable of the VA's communications and public affairs policies, procedures and organization messages and is accountable for the information disseminated by a particular website that meets the mission of his/her respective program or organization. The content manager must also ensure that web page content is current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA and/or Program Office mission, and spell-checked and grammatically correct. Webmasters and content managers may also be referred to collectively as Web Managers in this Handbook when responsibility for specific activities overlap or may be shared.

4. HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

a. This Handbook contains a compilation of legal mandates, regulations, and VA requirements that govern all VA Internet and Intranet websites and operating on behalf of VA, and web pages displayed on those. This Handbook contains links to specific information relevant to each requirement.

b. Many of the requirements covered in this Handbook apply differently to Internet and Intranet sites. All items are marked to show if they apply to the Internet, the Intranet, or both.

c. Mechanisms are in place that automate auditing of many of these requirements. Non-compliance with standards in this document may result in the removal of individual web pages or entire VA websites until compliant with VA Directive 6102 and this Handbook.

CHAPTER 2. WEBSITE REQUIREMENTS & PROHIBITIONS

1. WEBSITE REQUIREMENTS CHECKLIST. The following checklist provides a listing of the website requirements and also shows whether the requirements apply to the Internet, the Intranet or both. The first column is for webmasters to use to check off their website's compliance for each item; the second column is the checklist item number, the third column is the specific issue (issues may be represented by hyperlinks to click for more specific information); the fourth column is the synopsis of the requirement; the fifth and sixth columns state if the requirement pertains to the Internet, the Intranet or both as indicated by checkmarks.

WEBSITE CHECKLIST

✓	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	1	Use Government Domains	VA websites must use the va.gov domain. Permission to use any domain other than the VA.GOV domain (e.g. .com, edu, or org) may be granted only by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. Establishment of a new .gov domain requires GSA approval of a request made by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. Similar permission must be obtained to use an alias address to redirect to va.gov sites. See "VA Mandatory Guidelines" section for more information about domains.	✓	✓
	2	Show U.S. Sponsorship	All VA web pages must display "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs" prominently on the top of all web pages to ensure that website customers know that they are still in VA while navigating through the pages of all VA websites. See VA Web Best Practices Guide for more information.	✓	✓
	3	Use VA Web Request to initiate the creation of, or make significant changes, to VA websites	The VA Web Request form must be used to record and obtain permission for the creation of a new VA Internet/Intranet website and/or to make a significant change to an existing VA Internet or Intranet website; this mandate applies to both production and development websites. See VA Web Request section for details and/or click on the hyperlink to view the VA Web Request form at http://vaww.va.gov/webrequest/.	✓	✓

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	4	Register VA at websites VA Web Registry	VA websites and outsourced websites in production must be registered in the VA Web Registry database; web managers annually must certify compliance with 508 Accessibility and Privacy mandates. Other information must also be timely recorded and updated as necessary. See VA Web Registry section of Handbook and http://vaww.va.gov/webregistry/	✔	✔
	5	Establish Priorities and Schedules for Posting Content; obligation of Records Management Service (RMS) in VACO	VA must develop an inventory of information published on its agency website and post that information on an established schedule. This information can be found at Web Content Inventory and Publication Schedule which routes to http://www.va.gov/webinventory/.	✔ VA mgmt duty	
	6	Apply Principles in OMB Circular A-130: Mgmt of Federal Information Resources	The A-130 regulation is a broad mandate for all federal agencies to perform their information resources management activities efficiently, effectively, and economically, and ensure that all citizens are provided with optimal methods for the electronic communication of federal government information.	✔	✔
	7	Implement Security Protocols to Protect Information	VA websites must comply with Section 207(f)(1)(b)(iv) of the E-Gov Act of 2002, which requires all federal organizations to have security protocols to protect information provided by and collected on all agency websites and security for all hardware and software, as applicable. When encryption is required, FIPS 140-2 requires that it be a FIPS certified product/algorithm. See Handbook sections on Security and Links.	✔	✔
	8	Ensure Continuity of Operations During Emergencies	VA web managers must collaborate with the appropriate emergency preparedness officials at their respective locations regarding issues and activities relevant to the maintenance of the website during emergencies and must be knowledgeable about and familiar with any emergency plans that affect the website.	✔	✔

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	9	Provide Common Access for a Broad Range of Visitors	VA websites must be designed, developed, and tested for a broad range of visitors, including those with lower-end hardware and software capabilities, i.e., browsers that are one version older than current version. See the "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/.	✔	✔
	10	Organize Content Based on Audience Needs	VA websites should be organized in a logical and useful way by subject (topic, tasks, services, life events), by audience group, by geographic location, or any combination of these factors as the primary navigation. See the "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/ for details. Also see information at http://vaww.va.gov/webops/ for VA web page templates and other "How To" tips.	✔	✔
	11	Write and Organize Home pages from the Viewpoint of the Target Audience	VA websites must focus on helping the website's target audience(s) to efficiently find the services and information they seek from VA; VA home pages must help website visitors to get to the content they need and want most, with the fewest drilldowns, without hard to read presentation, without excess text and graphics, and without complex navigation. Web content managers must ensure that all VA web content is spell-checked and grammatically correct. See the "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/ for details and recommended methods for VA web managers.	✔	✔
	12	Write in Plain Language	VA web managers must ensure that home pages, all major entry points, and all navigational elements of their VA websites are written in plain language, which is language designed so that the website's typical visitor can understand the material presented in one reading. Internet pages should be written at a 7th grade level whenever possible, or at the most elementary level of understanding for the subject matter presented to the website's target audience; Intranet language should be appropriate to the target audience. VA web pages should be spell-checked and grammatically correct. See the "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/.	✔	✔

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	13	Use Basic Common Content, Terminology, and Placement	VA websites must include common terminology and placement where specified, using wording that is simple, straightforward and concise to optimize the understanding of the content of VA web pages and to make the use of navigational pathways easier for website visitors. Pages must share common branding attributes such as agency logos, official seals, and other recognized attributes that identify the Department through look and feel. Material relevant only to the Intranet must not appear on Internet pages; e.g., non-public information about VA employees, Intranet links on the Internet, links to internal VA resources. See Prohibited Practices section and also the "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/ for additional information.	☑	☑
	14	Ensure Information Quality	VA websites must comply with Section 515 Public Law 106-554, "Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Organizations", as provided in the VA Formal Information Quality Guidelines, 67 Federal Register 61726 (October 2002) and VA Directive 6361 and VA Handbook 6361, Ensuring Quality of Information Disseminated by VA. All information disseminated by a federal agency must be accurate to the maximum extent possible. Reports of inaccurate information posted on any VA website(s) must be investigated immediately by the website content manager by checking with document authors, if possible, with appropriate subject matter experts, the Section 515 Data Quality staff in VACO (see Who To Contact section in Appendix A) and/or other appropriate authoritative sources. Content that is determined to be inaccurate must be removed from the website and replaced with corrected information as quickly as possible or must be removed entirely from the web page(s). If the same inaccurate information is found elsewhere on any other VA website, web content managers must notify the content manager of that other site.	☑	☑

✓	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	15	Post required warning notices on VA websites.	Warning notices are required for all VA Internet and Intranet services and systems to help protect those systems and aid in investigating and/or prosecuting misuse or unauthorized use of those systems. Web managers must post warning notices on their VA websites that are in addition to any privacy or other notices on a specific website. Specific wording that applies to Internet, Intranet, application and restricted access sites is provided in the Approved Warning Notices section of this Handbook.	✓	✓
	16	Avoid Publishing Information for Employees on Internet Websites	VA Internet websites should not be used to convey information for VA employees except for biographical information about VA management officials or information specifically for employees that pertains to an emergent need for which the dissemination of employee-specific information on the Internet is appropriate. Any employee-specific information posted to the Internet must be clearly labeled as such. Web content managers must determine if employee-specific information appears on their VA Internet websites and must remove that information if it does not serve a specific and appropriate purpose.	✓	
	17	Avoid Duplication of Existing Content	VA websites should avoid duplicating or re-creating content that already exists on a federal website; links to identified authoritative content sources should be utilized. Before creating new information on a particular topic, web content managers must determine if the same or comparable information already exists on another VA website by using VA's Internet search engine (or Intranet website when applicable). Web content managers should also check other federal public websites and cross-agency portals such as the FirstGov website for information to which VA can provide a link. Web content managers may also use any other trusted sources to provide the necessary information to assist in this process. See checklist items #18 and # 60 re: requirement for FirstGov.gov link.	✓	✓

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	18	Collaborate in Developing Cross-Agency Portals	VA organizations must collaborate in developing cross-agency portals to ensure that they provide the breadth of information and services available across government to the target audience. Web managers and/or VA management officials who wish to develop cross-agency portals must seek prior approval from and coordinate all activities with the VA Web Management Governance Board to ensure that they meet a defined business need, include all appropriate organizations, do not duplicate existing portals, and have sufficient resources to be sustainable. Sponsoring organizations should have a strategic plan to ensure cross-agency portals can be effectively managed over time. See checklist items #17 and #60 re: required link to FirstGov.gov.	☑	
	19	Use Consistent Navigation	VA web pages must be navigable from their homepages to ensure that the hierarchy of pages above and below a web page are organized logically and afford easy navigation pathways for website visitors. Common items appearing on every organization page should, whenever possible, be in the same location and have the same appearance and wording on each page. Navigation items of the same type must also look and behave the same way. For guidance see "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/.	☑	☑
	20	Inform Audiences of Website Changes	When a significant VA website change occurs, e.g., a redesign, url change to a frequently visited page, major navigational changes, VA website managers must provide information to website visitors about the changes to minimize confusion and ease the transition for website visitors. Ways to inform the public about significant changes include posting notices about the change(s) on appropriate web pages that provide sufficient information and/or instructions regarding the change, and/or using redirected links. FirstGov.gov must also be notified if a change affects the information in their government domain directory or their search engine by utilizing their Contact Us link on the www.FirstGov.gov website.	☑	☑

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	21	Comply with Policy on Cookies	The use of persistent cookies on VA Internet websites is prohibited without an exception for specifically described cookies that provides a detailed justification for their use and necessity; exceptions may be granted only by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology if there is a documented "compelling need" for a specific persistent cookie or cookies. All exceptions must have prior written permission before use on any VA Internet websites. Session cookies are permitted on the Internet without seeking approval to do so. VA Intranet sites are permitted to use both persistent and session cookies without prior approval and consistent with applicable legal requirements, e.g., the Privacy Act. See Handbook Glossary for definitions of persistent cookies and session cookies; see Prohibited Practices section of the Handbook Chapter 6, paragraph1h, and http://vaww.va.gov/privacy/cookies.asp/.	✔	
	22	Evaluate Websites by Measuring Customer Satisfaction and Usability	VA must evaluate customer satisfaction and the usability of their VA Internet websites on a regular basis, and use those assessments to improve those respective VA websites. The feedback received from website visitors provides valuable information that should be utilized to make VA websites more efficient and more useful to all of VA's website visitors and must be used to ascertain how well VA websites are meeting the needs of their website visitors. Improvements should be made to enhance those VA websites when clear patterns of requested enhancements can be determined and those requests are compatible with VA's look and feel. For guidance on implementing Department-wide and/or individual customer satisfaction surveys on VA websites, contact the appropriate Point of Contact listed in the Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook. Also see the OMB Approval section of this Handbook for information about the rules that govern the collection of information from the public.	✔	

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	23	Provide Access for People with Limited English Proficiency; May apply on a case-by-case basis	VA must comply with existing requirements of Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for People with Limited English Proficiency," based on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans discrimination on the basis of national origin. VA web content managers must follow this guidance by determining if any documents on their VA websites require translation by basing this determination on a discernable pattern of recurring, specific requests from the public to provide a translated version of a specific document or documents posted to their respective VA websites. When high demand indicates that a document requires translation and its translation will serve VA's mission, the web content manager should take the necessary steps to provide and post a translated version of the document(s) on the website. Note: the Español link on the VA home page links to a VBA Compensation & Pension web page that lists a host of benefit pamphlets that are available in both English and Spanish and that provide information about compensation and pension benefits, education benefits, and summaries of benefits.	☑	N/A
	24	Comply with the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA)	VA websites must comply with the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA, Pub. L. 105-277), which requires that, when practicable, federal organizations use electronic forms, electronic filing, and electronic signatures to conduct official business with the public. The Act focuses on records management issues involving records created using electronic signature technology. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has issued guidance for agencies to implement the GPEA, as well as implementing other National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) guidance. VA web managers must ensure that any electronic forms, filings, and/or electronic signature capabilities utilized by or on their VA websites meet the full range of security, OMB, and other requirements; they must also obtain all appropriate permissions prior to deployment.	☑	

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	25	Provide Dates and Ensure Content is Current	A date stamp must appear on all VA home pages, all major entry point pages and all individual documents posted to the website to show visitors that the content is current and has been reviewed within the past 12 months, or that the material viewed is an historical or archival document. Obsolete archived content must be removed in compliance with Agency records management schedules (unless required to be on a website by law or regulation). See Who To Contact section in Appendix A for VA's Record Management Service (RMS). All non-archival web pages must display a Reviewed/Updated Date in the required date format, which is: Reviewed/ Updated Date: month day, year (i.e., May 5, 2005) Note: Pages that display dynamic content are exempt from this requirement; for example, it is preferable to exclude a date on a search engine form page because it does not represent the currency of the content in the search index. (There is also a date stamp requirement for metadata; these requirements are separate from each other and should be considered individually.) Archival/historical pages must be placed in clearly marked folders whose labels must include the words "archival" or "historical" so that documents contained in those folders will not be flagged because the dates on those documents are not sufficiently current. See Handbook Chapter 3 for more information on this subject and the Glossary for definitions of static and dynamic content.	✔	✔
	26	Incorporate Metadata Requirements	VA web pages must incorporate standardized metadata requirements to ensure uniformity in method and presentation of VA web pages. See "Metadata" section of this Handbook and also see detailed guidance and tutorial information that is linked from the http://vaww.va.gov/6102 Intranet website and also the http://vaww.va.gov/vawebsearch Intranet website. This metadata information must be checked periodically as standards and tutorial materials continue to be developed and posted.	✔	✔

✓	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	27	Comply with Digital Rights, Copyright, Trademark, and Patent Laws	Most federal website content is in the public domain and must not include copyright or other intellectual property notices. When information available from the private sector is utilized as part of an information resource, product or service, VA must ensure that the property rights of the private sector source are adequately protected. Protections apply to any material posted to federal websites, i.e., documents, graphics, or audio files. Prior to posting on a website, documents and web pages must be reviewed by content managers to ensure compliance with copyright, trademark and other laws.	✓	✓
	28	Comply with NARA Web Records Management Requirements	VA is required to manage its web records properly per NARA web records management requirements that govern federal government record-keeping practices, the management and disposition of records, risk mitigation, and other issues attendant to the creation, accumulation, integrity and disposition of web records. Web records include: documents that record information about the site itself: website management and operations records; web content records; and web management and operations records that provide context to the site. Click on NARA link for specific details.	✓	✓
	29	Comply with Records Management Rules	a) VA websites must comply with existing laws and regulations related to the management of all public web records. Requirements apply to IT staff and web/content managers. b) VA organizations must implement applicable policies and standards to implement the E-Government Act of 2002, Section 207(e), "Public Access to Electronic Information". The E-Government Act of 2002 provides information, guidance and requirements that apply to a variety of subjects, including the categorization of information, public access to electronic information, standards for agency websites, usability, and the preservation of government information, See http://www.archives.gov/about/laws/egov-act-section-207.html for specific details.	✓	✓

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	30	Comply with The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA)	VA websites must comply with the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA)(44 U.S.C. Chapter 35) to ensure that information collected from the public minimizes burden and maximizes public utility. Web managers must ensure that specific rules are followed when collecting information from Internet website visitors, and, when applicable, from Intranet website visitors. (OMB rules may apply to information collection activities on the Intranet under certain conditions; contact your OMB liaison for more information.) The requirement also applies to copying all or part of a form previously approved by OMB for use, and using all or part of that collection form as a new collection of information on another website. Collections of information on VA websites that have not received all necessary approvals prior to posting the collection tool (customer entry form, survey form or other collection mechanism) must be removed from the website until required approvals are sought and obtained. See OMB Approval section of the Handbook and also Prohibited Practices.	☑	☑
	31	Comply with VA Forms Requirements	All forms, including electronic forms and OMB-approved forms (see checklist item 30), fall under the purview of VA's Forms Management Program. This includes forms requiring collections of information; internal, administrative and operational forms; standard, optional, and other government agency forms and includes forms that collect information from the public as approved by OMB. All forms posted to VA websites must conform to requirements as stated in VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures at http://vaww.va.gov/pubs/handbooks/Information-Resources-Management-(IRM)/63101h.pdf Approval must be obtained from forms managers at each administration and from VA Forms Managers before posting to a VA website. Contact VA Forms Managers at VAFormsManagers@va.gov for more information. Also see Who To Contact and the Prohibited Practices sections.	☑	☑

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	32	Comply with requirements regarding draft documents	Draft documents posted to VA's Internet and/or Intranet must have a clear "draft" annotation on each page. The purpose for posting any draft document must be for obtaining comments from a website's visitors during an established comment period, or to provide preliminary information to website visitors prior to the issuance of a final document. Draft documents must be superseded by final copies or removed from VA websites when their content becomes obsolete. Website content managers must review periodically any draft documents posted to their VA websites to ensure that obsolete documents have been removed or replaced by final document copies. Special accommodation regarding the "draft" annotation must be made to meet Section 508 Accessibility requirements. See Prohibited Practices and the Section 508 Accessibility section for details.	✔	✔
	33	Obey Restrictions on Lobbying	VA websites are prohibited from being used for direct or indirect lobbying and/or any endorsements; VA websites must not endorse the content of non-federal websites or the sponsors of those non-federal websites. VA web managers must review the relevant law to ensure that their VA websites meet all requirements. Web pages that display content that is or may be construed to be direct or indirect endorsements, or are or may be construed to represent a direct or indirect lobbying effort must be removed immediately from a website and may not be restored until the inappropriate content is removed from those web pages. Questions about the acceptability of posting specific types of information on a VA website should be addressed to appropriate VA officials (see Who To Contact section in Appendix A) prior to posting. See the Prohibited Practices section of this Handbook.	✔	✔

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	34	Follow Standards of Categorization of Information	VA websites must comply with policies and standards to implement the E-Government Act of 2002, Section 207(d), based on recommendations from the Interagency Committee on Government Information's (ICGI's) Categorization of Information Working Group. Categorization of information relates to the classification and organization of information (e.g., thesaurus, taxonomy) so that VA's website visitors can find the information that they seek and which is available online. Web content managers must obtain guidance by utilizing the information and recommendations from ICGI. Click on the link below to access ICGI documents regarding the definitions of government information, open interoperable standards for searchable identifiers, and standards for categorizing government information. ICGI recommendations and other information on these topics may be found at http://www.cio.gov/documents/icgi.html.	✔	✔
	35	Conform to W3C HTML/XHTML Markup Language Requirements and Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) Standards	All VA web pages created in hypertext markup language (HTML) shall conform to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Specifications and Standards. Where Section 508 accessibility is concerned, web managers must ensure that the content and technical standards of all web pages and any documents made available on VA websites conform to Section 508 and the U.S. Access Board's accessibility standards, specifically the requirements of Web-based Intranet and Internet Information and Applications (1194.22). See Handbook Chapter 6 and http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=11#web/1194.22.	✔	✔
	36	Use VA Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) (when available)	VA websites must manage content by utilizing VA's Enterprise Content Management System when available for use; VA websites may continue to use existing web development tools until then. See the Enterprise Content Management section of this Handbook; also periodically check the Intranet website http://vaww.va.gov/cms/ for specific details and Frequently Asked Questions.	✔	✔

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	37	Provide Appropriate Access to Data by Using Appropriate File Formats	VA websites that provide material and data for downloading by the user for off-line analysis or manipulation must provide the data in open, industry-standard formats or in alternative formats that do not impose a burden on the intended audience and that permit the data to be manipulated and organized. The choice of a format must include the intended use of the data by website visitors, the expected frequency of use by website visitors, the accessibility of the format to the website's visitors; and the level of effort and time required by the organization to convert the data to the file format. In general, industry standard formats such as HTML and XML provide the greatest flexibility for visitors and should be the primary formats for documents on VA websites. Click on the two links listed in the Issue column for information on these related items and also see the "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/.	☑	☑
	38	Ensure that Web pages are "browser neutral"	VA Internet web pages must be "browser neutral", which is to say that they must not be written to meet the standards of a single browser such as Internet Explorer or Netscape. Presenting documents in open, industry-standard formats allows every person with a browser to read the documents and makes them easily retrievable using web search engines. VA Intranet web pages must be browser-neutral to the maximum extent possible; specialized applications on the Intranet may require specific browser versions to function correctly. Coding in HTML 4.01 Transitional or XHTML Transitional 1.1 will, in most circumstances, meet the need to be browser-neutral. Note: the use of plug-ins required to access specific documents and links to those plug-ins are required and may not be browser-neutral. See the VA Best Practices Guide at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/ and 1194.22(m) of Section 508 for more information.	☑	☑

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	39	Provide Required Website Policies and Links	VA's Internet websites must have a page for website policies and important links; the link to this page must be posted to all Internet web pages. The recommended location for a link to this page is at the bottom of every page. VA's link is Web Policies & Important Links. For a summary of the links that are permitted to appear on this page, see the Links section of the Handbook.	✔	✔
	40	Provide Online Services	VA Internet websites must offer easy access to online services to enable rapid access to all of those services by displaying links to those services on the VA homepage and all appropriate website home pages that provide the specific services.	✔	
	41	Provide Mandated Links on designated web pages	All VA web pages must cite links mandated for use on the Internet and/or Intranet on all appropriate web pages; see Links section of this Handbook for detailed information on mandated links for Internet and for Intranet sites, the pages on which those mandated links must appear, and also the mandated labels for links when naming conventions apply.	✔	✔
	42	Follow Basic Common Linking Practices	VA website visitors must be notified when they are leaving the website for a non-federal government website. VA Internet websites must disclaim responsibility for the content and privacy policies used by non-federal government websites and must not endorse the content of a non-government website or its sponsor. Intranet links must never be used on Internet pages; internal hyperlinks must be removed/redacted prior to external publication. Links must be reviewed by webmasters and/or content managers on a regular schedule to ensure their integrity. See Links section.	✔	✔
	43	Comply with the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA)	VA websites must comply with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, which requires organizations to make their department's annual performance plans readily available to the public. VA's link is Annual Performance and Accountability Report; this link must be posted on the VA home page and on all major entry point pages. See Links section of this Handbook.	✔	

✓	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	44	Link to the Home page	All VA Internet pages must have a link to the VA Home Page; in addition, each individual Internet website must also have a link to its own home page on all of its web pages. Intranet pages must have a link to the VA Intranet home page (or to their organizational Intranet home page) on all Intranet web pages; VA Intranet websites must also have a link to its own home page on all its web pages. VA's home pages can be accessed at VA Home (Internet) and VA Intranet Home (Intranet). Links to individual website home pages should be labeled to distinguish them from the VA Home and VA Intranet Home links. See Links section.	✓	✓
	45	Provide Access to Forms and Publications	The VA website homepage must post the VA Forms link to the department's home page to provide easy access to agency forms and publications. The page to which it links must also provide links to other federal portals that offer forms and publications for the public.	✓	
	46	Display Link to White House	The VA home page is required to have a link to the White House (mandated by the White House in July 2002).	✓	
	47	Comply with The Small Business Paperwork Relief Act	VA Internet websites must comply with the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, which requires organizations to designate a single point of contact for small businesses, and to post the contact information on the VA home page and all major entry point pages. A link to this information must also be displayed on the page linked to by the Contact the VA link VA's link is Small Business Contacts which links to VA's Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU). See Links section for more information.	✓	
	48	Display Link to USA Freedom Corps	The VA home page is required to have a link to the USA Freedom Corps per White House mandate in February, 2002. The USA Freedom Corps is an organization created to help more Americans engage in volunteer service; its website provides information about and links to volunteer and other donation opportunities.	✓	

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	49	Post Links to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)	VA Internet websites must comply with applicable regulations and directives that relate to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). VA websites must have a page that includes content required by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), United States Code, 5 U.S.C. Chapter 5, Subchapter II - Administrative Procedure §552 (Privacy Act of 1974, as amended); The VA home page must have a stand-alone link to the FOIA, or to a page that links to FOIA and also to an electronic FOIA reading room; VA's link is Freedom of Information Act. In addition, this link must appear on the web page linked to by Web Policies & Important Links page and must also appear on the page linked to by the Contact the VA link. See Links section.	☑	
	50	Provide a link to VA facility listings	All VA Internet web pages must have a link to VA's Facility Locator, which provides detailed information about all VA medical facilities, regional offices, and cemeteries throughout the country, an interactive US map, an area office map, a gravesite locator, and key staff information.	☑	
	51	Have a Search Engine	VA Internet websites must provide a link to the department search engine on every page, allowing visitors to search all files on the website that are intended for visitor use. Search results must be in an easy-to-read format, set minimum service level standards for their search capabilities, and monitor how well they are able to meet those standards. VA's Internet search engine is found at http://www.index.va.gov/ by clicking on Search. Local webmasters may also display links to a search capability that applies to their own VA Internet websites; that website's link label must distinguish it from the VA's department search link. The VA Intranet search capability is found at http://vaww.index.va.gov/search/; this link must be posted to the VA Intranet home page. See Links section for further information.	☑	☑

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	52	Provide Access for People with Disabilities (Section 508)	VA websites must comply with the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. 794d), designed to make online information and services fully available to individuals with disabilities. VA's link to Section 508 information is Section 508 Accessibility which appears on the page linked to by Web Policies & Important Links. The Intranet link for Section 508 Accessibility must appear on all Intranet home and major entry point Intranet pages. VA web managers must ensure that their websites comply with VA Directive 6221 & VA Handbook 6221 "Accessible Electronic and Information Technology (EIT)" that can be found at http://www.va.gov/pubs/directives/Information-Resources-Management-(IRM)/6221.htm. Webmasters must post only accessible web pages and documents to their VA websites. In addition, webmasters must certify their compliance with section 508 requirements annually on the VA Web Registry, and most also follow special requirements pertaining to the posting of draft documents to VA websites to inform sight-impaired website visitors that the information they are viewing is in draft and not final copy. See Links and the Section 508 Accessibility sections. Also see Prohibited Practices and the Who To Contact section in Appendix A for information and testing assistance for Section 508 issues.	☑	☑
	53	Provide Jobs Information	VA's Internet website must include information about jobs at VA, including what jobs are available and how to apply for them, information about working at VA, special jobs programs, such as internships and work-study, and other jobs-relevant information. The VA Job Opportunities website is http://www.va.gov/jobs/. A link to USA.Jobs must appear on the VA Jobs website home page so that the public can find information about jobs from across the federal government. See Links section.	☑	

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	54	Comply with the No Fear Act	VA must post on its Internet website summary statistical data relating to equal employment opportunity complaints filed by agency employees or by former agency employees, or applicants for employment with VA. VA must comply with the existing Notification and Federal Employee Anti-discrimination & Retaliation of 2002 (No Fear Act) Public Law No.107-174. The No Fear Act link, No Fear Act, must be posted as a stand-alone link on the VA Job Opportunities website home page and must also be posted to the web page linked to by Web Policies & Important Links that must appear on all Internet web pages. This link goes to http://www.va.gov/orm/NOFEAR-Select.asp. Another No Fear link to VA's policy and grievance process for VA employees must be posted to the Intranet homepage and to all major entry point pages on the Intranet. This Intranet link, also labeled No Fear Act, goes to http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm/EmployeeRelations/grievance.htm and should not be confused with the Internet link. See the Links section of this Handbook for details.	✔	✔
	55	Provide a link to Frequently Asked Questions	VA's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) link must appear on the VA home page and every major entry point page, using the title of the page(s) as the link text. The linked page or pages must provide answers to questions the agency and/or the VA website receives most often. VA's link routes to the IRIS (Inquiry Routing & Information System) FAQ Knowledge Base at https://iris.va.gov/scripts/iris.cfg/php.exe/enduser/std_alp.php which indexes with VA's search engine to provide an optimal return of information. There is also an existing HyperFAQ link that routes to http://www.va.gov/hyperfaq/ that is optional and may be used at the discretion of website managers. See Links section for specific information,	✔	

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	56	Apply and Post Privacy Requirements	VA Internet websites must protect the privacy of the American people as they interact with their government by complying with all privacy requirements, including: Conducting privacy impact assessments; Posting and/or linking to privacy policies on the agency's principal website, all known major entry points to their sites and any web page that collects substantial information in identifiable form; Posting a "Privacy Act Notice" that tells visitors about the organization's legal authority for collecting personal data and how the data will be used on all appropriate web pages; See http://www.usdoj.gov/foia/privstat.htm/, The Privacy Act of 1974, subsection (e)3 for specifics; Translating privacy policies into a standardized machine-readable format. OMB Guidance for Implementing the Privacy Provisions of the E-Government Act of 2002 can be found at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/memoranda/m03-22.html/ There is also a separate Privacy Policy that applies to the Intranet. Each policy has a link to its own url: Privacy Policy (Internet) and Intranet Privacy Policy (Intranet). The appropriate Privacy policies must be posted to VA web pages as discussed in the Links section of this Handbook. In addition, VA web managers are required to certify annually on the VA Web Registry that their respective VA websites are complaint with all Privacy requirements. See Privacy section and Links section for further information.	☑	☑
	57	Provide Information about Grants and Contracts	Every VA component that provides grants or has contracting opportunities must provide information about those opportunities on its website and must link to Grants.gov and other appropriate cross-agency portals. Organizations that post contracts information must link to federal portal(s) with contracting information related to that organization. See Links section.	☑	

✔	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	58	Provide Information about Regulations	Every VA component that issues regulations and that has a website must provide information about those regulations on its Internet website and must also link to the Regulations.gov portal; the Regulations.gov portal is where the public can find, review, and submit comments on federal documents that are open for comment and published in the Federal Register. All VA components responsible for issuing regulations must comply with the requirements of 5 USC §552(a)(1) and (a)(2), the E-Government Act Section 207(f)(1)(A)(ii), and all applicable legal requirements including VA Handbooks and Directives. See Links section for additional information.	✔	
	59	Provide VA Site Map or Subject Index	The VA website must have a page entitled "Site Map" that provides an overview of the major content categories on the VA website. There must be a link to the Site Map from all VA Internet website home pages, using those words as the link text. These pages must be kept up-to-date so they are useful to your audience. VA's site map link is Site Map. If a web manager creates a link to a site map for an individual VA website, the web manager must label the link to that website's site map to distinguish it from the department Site Map link. See Links section.	✔	
	60	Link to Appropriate Cross-Agency Portals	VA websites must link to appropriate cross-agency portals when applicable and meaningful to website visitors, to guide the visitors to additional resources that exist across the U.S. government. Links to cross-agency websites (portals) can supplement or eliminate the need to create information on VA websites and can guide visitors to additional resources to help them find what they need. An example of a cross-agency portal is FirstGov at http://www.firstgov.gov; this is a mandated link that must be posted to all federal websites. See Links section and items #18 and #60 on this checklist.	✔	✔

✓	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	61	Use or link to the IRIS (Inquiry Routing & Information System)	VA's Contact the VA link routes to the IRIS home page. That page provides links that are required to appear on this page including links to toll-free phone numbers, to the Facilities Locator, to FOIA, to the VA Small Business contact, to the IRIS FAQ Knowledge Base which is indexed with the VA search capability, and to an approved electronic system for inquiry submission and routing to and tracking by participating offices, facilities, and entities throughout VA. VA organizations are encouraged to participate in the IRIS if not already doing so. Individual VA websites must provide a link to the IRIS on their own website contact pages, if any, or must provide a link to the IRIS in addition to a link to the website's webmaster that is used only to report operational problems with the website. See the IRIS section and the Links section of this Handbook and also find specific information about the IRIS at http://vaww.va.gov/irisinfo.	✓	
	62	Provide Organizational information ("About Us" page)	The VA home page and all major entry point pages must post the About VA link. This link must use the page title as the link text. The page(s) must provide basic information about the VA organization. At a minimum, this page or pages must include all of the following: a) A description of VA's mission, including statutory authority (required by Section 207 (f)(1)(A)(i) of the E-Government Act of 2002); b) VA's strategic plan (required by Section 207 (f)(1)(A)(iv) of the E-Government Act of 2002); c) information about VA's organizational structure (required by Section 207 (f)(1)(A)(iii) of the E-Government Act of 2002); d) Basic information about VA parent and subsidiary organizations and regional and field offices, as appropriate (See §552(a)(1) ; e) the names of the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Under Secretaries, the heads of staff offices and of the Administrations, and other key staff, as appropriate (see 5 U.S.C. §552(a)(1); and 6) contact information. See Links section.	✓	

☑	#	Issue	Synopsis of Requirement	Internet Sites	Intranet Sites
	63	Link to FirstGov.gov	The E-Government Act of 2002 designates FirstGov.gov as the official web portal of the U.S. Government which serves as the "home page" for the entire U.S. government by providing a topical and organizational directory of U.S. government websites, a government-wide search index, links to all federal and state government websites, and a host of other information useful to members of the public, government employees, and business and non-profit organizations. VA Internet websites must link to FirstGov from their home pages and major entry point pages to the home page of FirstGov.gov, using the FirstGov link. See Links section and also checklist items #17 and #18.	☑	
	64	Provide Contact information	VA Internet websites must have the Contact the VA link on their home pages; it must also appear on every major entry point page. VA's link routes to the IRIS home page at https://iris.va.gov/; the IRIS homepage provides all the information and links required for the web page accessed by the Contact the VA link. In addition, all individual VA Internet websites must provide a contact link for the website itself in addition to the Contact the VA link; the link label must be the same as the title of the page to which it links and must be a label that can be distinguished from the Contact the VA link. See the Links section for specific requirements about contact links for individual VA Internet websites.	☑	

2. PROHIBITED PRACTICES. The following activities are prohibited practices. Use of these practices will result in the removal of specific web pages or entire VA websites from VA's web presence until the web pages or websites are in compliance with this Handbook as determined by the responsible staff officers. Questions and requests for guidance on any of these prohibited practices should be addressed to the appropriate VA officials listed in the Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook. Prohibited practices include and are not limited to:

a. Using domains other than va.gov without official approval to do so.

b. Creating and implementing production VA websites in the va.gov domain or other approved domain for or on behalf of VA without receiving appropriate, documented prior permission (see VA Web Request).

c. Failing to register a production website in the VA Web Registry (see VA Web Registry).

d. Failing to link websites from a website's designated Agency, Program Office, facility or field website; VA websites must have appropriate parent/child relationships in the VA hierarchy.

e. Linking to external sites that are not related to VA's mission.

f. Failing to employ branding on a web page to the extent it causes a web customer to question whether he or she is still viewing a VA web page. (See Glossary for definition of branding.)

g. Posting Intranet-only information on VA Internet pages such as information about individual employees except for biographical information about VA management officials; posting information specifically for employees on the Internet without clearly identifying it as employee-specific and without an emergent need for which the dissemination of information specifically for employees on the Internet is appropriate; using Intranet links on the Internet and/or linking to internal VA resources (server, print server, individual work station, etc.) from the Internet, example \\vaisw.xxxx; failing to remove/redact internal hyperlinks prior to external publication.

h. Demonstrating or giving the appearance of favoritism to a commercial website when there are multiple sources of the same information.

i. Posting content on an Internet website that requires a specific browser for viewing. VA Internet web pages must be browser-neutral and viewable with industry-standard browsers with the exception of browsers and plug-ins and links to those plug-ins that are required to access specific VA applications or documents. VA Intranet websites must utilize a browser-neutral approach to Intranet web pages to the maximum extent possible.

j. Disseminating any information on Internet and/or Intranet web pages that is or can be reasonably construed to be an endorsement or promotion of vendors or products, or information that purports to sell goods or services to Internet or Intranet customers.

k. Posting information on any VA website that is or may be construed to be the conducting of personal business or other use not appropriate to VA's mission. Examples of this activity include, but are not limited to, soliciting for contributions to a political cause, soliciting the sale of an individual's or other person's personal property, and selling goods or services for one's own benefit. Questions about the acceptability of posting specific types of information on a VA website should be addressed to appropriate VA officials (see Who To Contact section in

Appendix A) and/or the Office of General Counsel or local Regional Counsel prior to posting. Also see Directive 6001, "Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment including Information Technology" which can be found at https://vaww.ocis.va.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_2_17354_0_0_18/limuse.doc.

l. Including advertising-style banner images on web pages that could be construed as advertising for software plug-ins (e.g., "Get Acrobat Now!" banner, "Get Flash Now" banner); the inclusion of icons and/or links to plug-ins that are required to access VA content or VA applications that are used on or posted to a VA website is permitted.

m. Failing to obtain and post necessary prior approvals for collecting information on forms posted to the Internet and/or Intranet, and/or copying all or part of a form that has been previously approved by OMB and using all or part of that form on another website without contacting the appropriate OMB liaison and without obtaining permission prior to such utilization. (See OMB Approvals section of this Handbook.)

n. Soliciting by or from federal employees for contribution/donation of funds, goods, or services without the prior written approval of authorized VA officials and adherence to all relevant guidelines that govern solicitations.   Any questions on this subject should be addressed to appropriate VA officials and/or the Office of General Counsel or local Regional Counsel.

o. Posting procurement-sensitive information on an unsecured, open access Internet or Intranet website.

p. Failing to secure sensitive information, including but not limited to, non-public information about VA employees on the Internet and/or the Intranet.

q. Including sensitive information on VA websites that could be used to exploit VA resources. Examples of information to exclude online: internal facility floor plans or schematics, detailed aerial photographs, details about computer systems, personal information such as family information in an employee bio.

r. Using persistent cookies on a VA Internet website without prior written permission for specifically defined cookies; exceptions to the prohibition of persistent cookies on VA Internet websites may only be granted by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology if there is a documented "compelling need" and that approval must be in writing. Persistent cookies are permitted on Intranet sites without written permission provided their use is consistent with applicable legal requirements, e.g., the Privacy Act. Session cookies are allowed on both Internet and Intranet sites and do not require approval.

s. Posting draft documents on an Internet or Intranet website for reasons other than to obtain comments from a website's visitors during an established comment period, or to provide preliminary information to website visitors prior to the issuance of a final document (exception is VA Handbooks and/or VA Directives which may not be posted to any VA websites in draft form); failing to clearly mark each page of the document with the word "draft"; posting drafts that contain confidential, privileged information without pass-wording that information in a secure environment; failing to remove draft documents from the Internet or Intranet when they become obsolete and replacing them with final versions or removing them from publication without replacement. Note: While marking each page with the word "draft" on all pages using headers or footers and/or watermarks are acceptable methods for sighted website visitors, those formats are not accessible to website visitors using screen

readers. To provide notice to the sight-impaired that the information being viewed is in draft form, web managers must include the word "draft" in a text link to the documents and must also ensure that the word "draft" is included in the text of the document at or near the beginning of the document (subject, title, or in introductory paragraphs), or web content managers may attach a preface statement to the document that states in text that the document is a draft. It is not necessary to place this additional text on all other pages to satisfy this requirement. Questions about posting draft documents to the Internet should be addressed to appropriate VA web management officials (see Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook);

    t. Failing to remove or correct information from a VA Internet and/or Intranet site that is known to be obsolete, inaccurate, irrelevant to the VA mission, and/or that contains multiple spelling and grammatical errors (exceptions are historical or archival documents that may not be altered, or linked documents over which VA has no editorial control).

    u. Failing to notify another website manager that inaccurate information appears on his/her website.

    v. Failing to conform to VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures, requirements that pertain to all forms, including electronic forms and OMB-approved forms; failing to obtain prior permission from administration and VA Forms Managers before posting forms on VA websites.

CHAPTER 3. CONTENT MANAGEMENT & TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT OF WEB PAGES (INTERNET & INTRANET)

1. DEFINITION OF CONTENT. Content is the information to be disseminated to website visitors. For the purposes of this document, content does not include overall page attributes such as branding, font size, etc., which must be standardized as defined in this document. Content and technical managers should also consult the VA Web Best Practices Guide for additional information and guidance on templates, fonts, images, branding, logos, links, etc.

2. CONTENT MANAGEMENT. Designated staff are expected to provide and maintain the quality and accuracy of the information posted to web pages. Information should be current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA mission, and spell-checked and grammatically correct. The content for publication must be approved by appropriate VA management who have line authority over the website, and must be updated as often and timely as necessary to ensure currency and accuracy. Internet web pages should be written at a 7th grade level to ensure the broadest level of comprehension or to the most elementary level of understanding for the subject matter presented to the target audience; Intranet pages should be written at a level of comprehension appropriate to the target VA audience.

3. TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT. Designated web management staff are required to take the approved content for web pages and to embed it into the proper web page formats. Web managers must also test pages to ensure that the appearance conforms to VA standards for look and feel, that there is consistent navigation, that all required links appear on the page, that there are no broken links, and that all mandatory requirements, including Section 508 compliance, privacy, date stamps and formats are met.

CHAPTER 4. REQUIREMENTS FOR CREATING, CHANGING AND REGISTERING VA WEBSITES

1. VA WEB REQUEST (INTERNET & INTRANET)

a. **VA Web Request Requirement**. VA Web Request is the mandatory first step in the process for initiating the creation of a new production or development VA Internet or Intranet website, and/or to make significant changes to an existing production or development VA Internet or Intranet website. This requirement also applies to all websites that conduct business on behalf of VA. Examples of significant changes include changing technologies such as HTML to ColdFusion (CFM) or to Active Server Pages (ASP); adding a database application. (Updating content and/or authorizing routine website maintenance activities are not considered significant changes for VA Web Request purposes.) Questions regarding "significant changes" must be addressed to the appropriate VA officials shown in the Who to Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook.

b. **VA Web Request Form**. The VA Web Request form resides on the http://vaww.va.gov/webrequest/ website and asks a series of questions relevant to site name, site type, purpose of site, organizational ownership, names of Points of Contact, etc. The form is routed automatically to the appropriate VA officials for the organization to which the website belongs for review and approvals to proceed; VBA requests are forwarded to vba.web.administrator@vba.va.gov, NCA requests are forwarded to public.inquiry@va.gov, VHA requests are forwarded to vhawebcommunications@va.gov, and all other requests are sent to VA6102oss@va.gov. Approving officials will review the form and will approve or deny requests, and/or may request additional information prior to making a determination. Once approved and established, all VA websites in production must be entered in VA Registry; VA production websites that are hosted by VA Web Operations will have their new VA websites automatically entered into the VA Web Registry after approvals are granted and the website is established. Webmasters whose production websites are not hosted by VA Web Operations are required to register their sites in VA Web Registry manually until electronic means for automatic registration are established at hosting sites other than the VA Web Operations hosting site. (See VA Web Registry section below.)

2. VA WEB REGISTRY (INTERNET & INTRANET)

a. **VA Web Registry Responsibility**. The VA Web Registry is a One-VA database application that is maintained by VA CIO's Information Technology Operations (ITO) to manage the quality and compliance of VA production websites, both Internet and Intranet, VA-hosted and outsourced. Registration in and updates to the VA Web Registry are the responsibility of the web managers of every VA website in production.

b. **VA Web Registry Content.** Specific information that includes website address, VA website points of contact (POCs) for technical issues and for content, technology used and plug-in requirements for all VA websites in production. VA websites that are created solely for development purposes are exempt from this requirement only while they remain in development status; once converted to production (including pilot status), they must be entered in the Web Registry. Development sites that are utilized as production sites without meeting all requirements and obtaining necessary prior approval will be shutdown until all requirements are met and permission is obtained to resume operation.

c. **VA Web Registry Mandate.** VA production websites must be entered in the VA Web Registry to ensure that the VA Enterprise Compliance Monitoring software is able to audit compliance with applicable requirements. Information in the VA Web Registry must be updated by web managers whenever changes to the recorded information occur. The Web Registry can be found at http://vaww.va.gov/webregistry/.

CHAPTER 5. INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE (INTERNET AND INTRANET)

1. GENERAL. VA website content must be organized in ways that are meaningful and useful to website visitors and must use information architecture principles and standards. VA Administrations, Program Offices and facility sites, and other VA organizations that provide web services must assess their audiences' wants and needs to determine information needs and to provide optimum content organization.

2. VA OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONTENT. VA will be responsible for the creation and maintenance of website sections that are required by legislation or policy. Duplication or re-creation of this content is prohibited unless the prohibition against duplication or re-creation of website content is waived in accordance with this Handbook. Waivers should be submitted to public.inquiry@va.gov for NCA websites, vba.web.administrator@vba.va.gov for VBA websites, vhawebcommunications@va.gov for VHA websites and VA6102oss@va.gov for all other VA websites. Waivers will be considered on a case-by-case basis and may be granted when the duplication or re-creation is to the benefit of users of the VA website. While links must be provided to official statements, VA statement sections may be duplicated or re-created; however, VA strongly encourages VA websites to have links to this content as the authoritative source instead of duplicating or re-creating it. See Links section for additional information.

3. VA STATEMENT SECTIONS. VA statement sections are the following, and links to each of them are listed in information posted to http://vaww.va.gov/6102/ and are also discussed elsewhere in this Handbook:

a. The agency's strategic plan and annual performance plans.

b. Descriptions of agency organizational structure, mission and statutory authority.

c. Information made available under the Freedom of Information Act.

d. Summary statistical data about equal employment opportunity complaints filed with the agency and written notification of "whistleblower" rights and protections as required.

e. Global (site-wide) website search.

f. Electronic web-ready versions of the Agency Seal and Signature.

g. Specific website privacy policies.

h. Links to FirstGov.Gov.

i. The agency point of contact for small businesses.

j. Other cross-government portals or links required by law or policy.

k. Agency linking policies, which may include associated link disclaimer pages.

4. E-GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS RELEVANT TO INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE.
Subject to the requirements of this Handbook, VA will provide guidance but defer to each
Administration on e-government requirements relevant to Information Architecture and
website content updates, including:

a. Making determinations about and developing inventories, priorities and schedules for
website content and making government information available and accessible to the public, in
accordance with public comment, and posting this information on an Administration's website.

b. Assuring suitable information and service quality consistent with information quality
requirements discussed elsewhere in this Handbook and that includes clearly identifying the
limitations inherent in the information dissemination product (e.g., possibility of errors, degree
of reliability, and validity) so that users are fully aware of the quality and integrity of the
information or service being provided, removing the limitations inherent in the information if
any, and reconsidering delivery of the information or services; establishing and maintaining
communications with members of the public and with state and local governments to ensure
that the agency creates information dissemination products that satisfactorily meet their
respective needs; determining whether any individual document or documents on their
Federal agency public website(s) requires translation.

5. VA RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRAINING. VA will provide regular training to VA personnel
responsible for the operation, maintenance and content of VA websites, including:

a. Understanding WebTrends reports and using those reports to modify content, update
web pages, prioritize needed changes and measure the success of any changes.

b. Understanding compliance monitoring reports and using those reports to prioritize
updates and to improve website accessibility in compliance with Section 508 and with other
applicable requirements.

c. Understanding IRIS reports and using those reports to modify Frequently Asked
Questions (FAQs) content and to improve customer service to VA's website visitors who
utilize the IRIS to communicate with the VA.

d. Using VA's Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) to manage the content of
all VA web pages.

e. Providing other training as determined by the VA Web Management Governance
Board.

f. Providing other training as determined by Administrations and Program Offices through
needs assessments and strategic planning and any training required by law or considered
appropriate.

6. CONSULTATION WITH OFFICE of GENERAL COUNSEL. VA officials should consult
with the Office of General Counsel about any legal questions concerning VA website content.

CHAPTER 6. MANDATORY FEDERAL AND VA WEBSITE REQUIREMENTS (INTERNET & INTRANET)

1. APPLICATION OF MANDATES TO VA WEBSITES (INTERNET AND INTRANET)

a. **Domains.**

(1) Citizens must be able to identify official VA websites and trust that those VA websites will provide current and accurate VA information. VA websites must use government domains (.gov), show U.S. sponsorship, follow basic common linking practices, and be current. To achieve this end, VA websites must use a domain ending with va.gov unless prior permission to use another domain is granted. This permission to use any but the VA.GOV domain (e.g., .com, edu, or org) may be granted only by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. Establishment of new .gov domains requires GSA approval of a request made by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. Requests for exemptions must be sent to; vba.web.administrator@vba.va.gov for VBA, public.inquiry@va.gov for NCA, vhawebcommunications@va.gov for VHA, and VA6102oss@va.gov for all others. Requests for an exemption will be forwarded to the CIO and must include a detailed justification for using a domain other than VA.GOV. No waivers for VA websites developed in collaboration with non-federal partners (e.g., a local university or medical research facility) are permitted; VA websites developed in collaboration with non-federal partners are subject to all federal rules and regulations and all VA requirements as set forth in this Handbook.

(2) Using Alias Addresses to access a VA domain**:** Explicit prior permission must be obtained to use an "alias" on an Internet website so that non-va.gov sites can redirect to an Internet va.gov domain; for example, a web address ending in .com, when clicked on, will redirect to a www.xxxxxx.va.gov web address. A non-VA gov Internet site can only be redirected to an Internet va.gov address; redirecting to an Intranet site is prohibited. Prior permission must be sought in writing by contacting vba.web.administrator@vba.va.gov for VBA requests, public.inquiry@va.gov for NCA requests, vhawebcommunications@va.gov for VHA requests for VHA, and VA6102oss@va.gov for all other organizations Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis; the requestor will be notified of the decision. If approval for the alias address is granted, a va.gov redirect address must be created to receive the re-directed traffic using the VA Web Request process. When the redirect address is created, the web traffic will be routed through the redirect action from the original .edu, .org. com, etc., web address.

b. **Approval for Creating and Publishing a New Website, Changing an Existing Website, and the Requirement to Register VA Production Websites.** The publication of VA websites requires prior approval authorizing the creation and the publication of the website. VHA, VBA, NCA, and other VA approving entities must have policies that delineate the appropriate chains of approval for obtaining and maintaining approval of website publication. Accountability for the content of each website must be included in any justification for publication of a VA website or a website contracted to act on VA's behalf. See http://vaww.va.gov/webrequest/, the VA Web Request section of this Handbook, http://vaww.va.gov/webregistry/, and the VA Web Registry section of this Handbook for additional requirements and details.

c. **Standards for Establishing a VA Website.**

(1) Internet web pages must be designed to support the widest range of potential users and computing platforms; however, specific products, plug-ins, or links to those plug-ins that are required to access a VA application or VA content must be provided to the visitors of the website where the content or applications reside. All web pages created in hypertext markup language (HTML) shall conform to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Specifications and Standards.

(a)   Where accessibility is concerned, follow the Access Board Guidelines to Web-based Intranet and Internet Information and Applications (1194.22) found at http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/1194.22.htm/). The following standards will apply when creating a VA website:

(b)   When coding for HTML-based documents or files on the Internet, webmasters or others producing the code must utilize HTML 4.01 Transitional, which is the minimum acceptable standard. The preferred standard is XHTML 1.1 Transitional. Transitioning to XHTML will position agency web pages for an easier transformation to an XML environment in the future.

(c)   Webmasters must use development technologies already approved by appropriate VA management officials; permission to use development technologies not already approved must be obtained in writing prior to utilizing those technologies. Those technologies must meet all requirements consistent with this Handbook. Any questions about the use of or permission for programming or scripting languages should be directed to the approving officials in the Who to Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook.

(2) VA Intranet websites must use approved servers and technologies per requirements as directed by Enterprise Architecture at http://vaww.va.gov/oit/eam. Questions about currently approved technologies and systems should be addressed to the appropriate management officials in the Who to Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook.

d. **Priorities and Posting Content Schedule.** VA must establish priorities and a schedule for posting content on their Internet websites; this responsibility is assigned to the agency's Records Management Service. This information is linked via the "About VA" web page by clicking on the Website Information link on the side stripe and then clicking on Web Content Inventory and Publication Schedule, which routes to http://www.va.gov/webinventory/.

e. **Content Review.** VA web content managers must review the content of their websites no less than once per year to ensure the currency and integrity of published information. All VA web pages must display on the bottom of each web page a Reviewed/Updated field that displays a date no older than one year earlier than the date it is viewed. The date format must be month, day, and year; an example is: Reviewed/Updated: January 7, 2005.   Other date formats may not be used.   Exceptions are:

(1) Documents and files that contain information that will never change including veterans appeals decisions, legislative histories, policy decisions, precedent opinions, memoranda, and legal documents whose content is permanent are exempt from this requirement. These documents should be placed in specifically marked folders so that they can be identified as

historical and/or archival and can be excluded from any audit process that flags documents based on the currency of the dates of those documents. VA Web Operations must be provided with identifying information about those folders, including ownership, folder names and nature of contents, to remove them from the web page audit process conducted by VA's compliance monitoring tool. (See Compliance Monitoring Tool section of this Handbook for details.)

(2) Pages that display dynamic content such as search engine form pages may exclude a date on a search engine form page because it does not represent the currency of the content in the search index. The documents found and displayed by the search engine should have dates that are no greater than one year old unless they are historical documents that will never change.

(There is also a date stamp requirement for metadata; these requirements are separate from each other. Please see the Metadata section of this Handbook for more information.)

f. **Website Compliance with all Mandates.** VA webmasters and content managers must ensure the compliance their websites with all federal mandates. Existing requirements are listed in the Website Checklist and in other sections of this Handbook. Information can also be found at: http://www.firstgov.gov/webcontent/index.shtml/ and on documents linked to at this web address.

g. **Compatibility with Internet Browsers.** VA Internet websites and web pages may not be browser-specific. Operators of VA websites must ensure compatibility with most industry-standard browsers, such as Internet Explorer and Netscape. Intranet pages must be browser-neutral to the maximum extent possible.

h. **Ensuring the appropriate use of cookies on VA Internet Websites.** Definitions of the two types of cookies, persistent cookies and session cookies, may be found in the Glossary of this Handbook under Cookies. Information about the use of cookies is available on the VA Intranet website, and also can be found at http://vaww.va.gov/privacy/cookies.asp/ and at http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/cookies_letter90500.html/.

(1) Persistent cookies are permitted on VA Intranet websites but are prohibited on the Internet unless granted specific exceptions for use. They may be used on the Internet only when:

(a) The site gives clear and conspicuous notice that the site is using persistent cookies;

(b)There is a compelling need to gather the data on the site;

(c) Appropriate and publicly disclosed privacy safeguards exist for handling any information derived from the cookies; and

(d) The Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology authorizes, in advance, the use of the specific persistent cookie.

(2) Session cookies are permitted on both the Internet and the Intranet so that website visitors can conduct business with the Department and do not require permission for use.

   i. **Use of Content Management System.** VA Web content must be managed by the Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS, also called CMS) which will be hosted at the Enterprise Data Centers as outlined by the Web Hosting and Consolidation Initiative (WH/CI). This tool must be used by all VA Internet and Intranet websites as its use is made available across VA; existing web development tools should be used until VA websites are included in ECMS. All details relevant to using and participating in this system can be found on the ECMS Intranet website at http://vaww.va.gov/cms/. Also see ECMS section of this Handbook.

   j. **Use of the Information Routing & Inquiry System (IRIS).** The IRIS is a web-based e-communications tool for the public to use when communicating with VA via the Internet; the IRIS is accessed by clicking on the Contact the VA link that must be posted to the VA home page and all major entry point pages. The use of this tool satisfies the mandate that all federal websites provide a mechanism to communicate with the agency via electronic means. (Other acceptable alternatives are addressed in the IRIS section of this Handbook.)

   k**. Use of Mandated Links.** Links to appropriate information should be contained on Internet and Intranet web pages. For detailed information on this subject, see the Links section of this Handbook.

2. METADATA REQUIREMENTS (INTERNET & INTRANET)

   a. **What is Metadata?** Metadata is summary information about a file posted on-line, such as a .doc, .pdf, or .xls file. Typically, it includes several elements of HyperText Markup Language (HTML) which define information about the properties of the document or resource it describes in the same way that a library catalog card defines the elements of a book. See Glossary for a more detailed description.

   b. **Mandate.** Metadata must be implemented on all web pages and documents that are posted to VA websites. Documents and their formats include, and are not limited to, Adobe Acrobat (PDF), Microsoft Word (DOC and DOT), Microsoft Excel (XLS), Microsoft Visio (VSD), Microsoft PowerPoint (PPT and PPS), HyperText Markup Language (HTML, HTM and SHTML), ColdFusion (CFM), Active Server Pages (ASP) and JavaServer Pages (JSP) files, as well as web pages authored using Microsoft FrontPage, Macromedia Dreamweaver, WebPilot and the Enterprise Content Management System. Guidance for implementing required and optional metadata fields is provided in the VA Metadata Standard and the Metadata Tutorial by clicking on the metadata link on the VA 6102 Intranet website at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/. The VA Web Search Improvement website contains the required and the optional controlled vocabulary listings for the specific metadata elements requiring them. Web managers must check this website periodically to determine if more elements have been added and, if so, must implement any not already utilized. The following chart provides an overview of some of the metadata elements and should not be considered inclusive. All new documents/files posted to VA Internet or Intranet websites are required to implement the mandatory elements. In addition, webmasters must incorporate the mandatory metadata elements on all existing pages on all VA websites by December 31, 2007.

Metadata Elements Chart: (Note Some element titles purposely lack spaces between words to conform to the labeling requirement of the metadata.)

Element	Description	Format/Value	Requirement	Purpose
Title	Formal title on the resource. Must include agency's name in parenthesis.	Free text	Mandatory	Search, Display, Relevancy
TitleAlternative	Significant subtitle or a name other than the title, that the resource is commonly called.	Free text	Optional	Search, Display, Relevancy
Creator	Creator Authority List available for VA offices	Free text	Mandatory	Search
Description	An abstract or free text account, of the content of the resource.	Free text	Mandatory	Search, Display, Relevancy
Keywords	Terms and phrases representing significant concepts discussed in the resource.	Base on keywords in the web document content until superseded by Controlled Vocabulary: VA Web Thesaurus	Mandatory	Search, Relevancy
Subject	Subject categories representing the primary topic(s) of the content of the resource.	Base on web document content until superseded by Controlled Vocabulary: VA Web Thesaurus	Mandatory	Search, Relevancy
DateCreated	Original date the resource was created	YYYYMMDD	Mandatory	Search, Display
DateReviewed	Date on which the resource was last reviewed.	YYYYMMDD	Mandatory	Search, Display
Language	Language Authority List	Controlled Vocabulary: Language Codes List	Mandatory	Search, Display
Replaces	A reference to a resource that has been replaced by the current resource.	Title, Date YYYYMMDD and URL.	Conditional	Search, Display
ReplacedBy	A reference to a resource that replaces/supersedes the current resource.	Title, Date YYYYMMDD and URL.	Conditional	Search, Display
Type	The nature or genre of the content of the resource.	Controlled Vocabulary: Resource Type List	Mandatory	Search, Display
Coverage	The date range including the start and end date of resources that cover a limited time span, or are in effect for a limited period of time.	Two fields: Coverage Start and Coverage End YYYYMMDD	Conditional	Search, Display, Website management
Version	A numeric or alphanumeric reference to the edition or revision of the resource.	Free Text	Conditional	Search, Display, Website management

3. CYBER AND INFORMATION SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

a. **Background.** As the VA increases the scope and utility of its information technology, the VA increases its reliance on these technologies; this reliance increases the potential risks and impacts of violations of VA information security, including the impact of these violations on the trust between veterans and the VA. These risks and impacts drive VA information security criteria for information systems.

b. **Security Criteria.** VA information security criteria include the ability to authenticate users and data, knowing and controlling authorization to add, change, delete and obtain information, the ability to audit information systems and their use, and management, operational and technical controls of data and access that provide continuously provable confidentiality, integrity and availability.

c. **Requirements.** The security requirements for VA websites and websites that represent VA are:

(1) The system owner of each VA website shall evaluate the web application under National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Special Publication(SP) 800-37, Guide for the Security Certification and Accreditation of Federal Information Systems, and determine its certification and accreditation category as a General Support System (GSS), Major Application (MA), or minor application; its sensitivity categorization using Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) 199, Standards for Security Categorization of Federal Information and Information Systems; and its recommended security controls according to NIST SP 800-53, Recommended Security Controls for Federal Information Systems. Where appropriate, a certification and accreditation (C&A) shall be conducted, resulting in an authority to operate, prior to the system or application going into production.

(2) VA websites must follow the guidelines of the NIST SP 800-44, Guidelines on Securing Public Web Servers, which defines server and web content security for public web servers.

(3) VA website managers who are responsible for the placement of content on VA public web servers, operate VA public web servers, and/or are contracted by VA to operate a VA website, are responsible for meeting the following cyber-security requirements

(a) ensuring the integrity, availability and confidentiality of that content. Meeting this responsibility requires the management of web servers, securing the web server, securing web content, determining authentication and encryption requirements, implementing a secure network for a web server, and recovering from a security compromise.

(b) using, configuring, or obtaining and implementing technology and systems to prevent security violations that are intentional or unintentional acts, including, but not limited to: unauthorized alteration of data, malicious insertion of data, unauthorized use of data and data resources, unauthorized disclosure, internal and external sabotage, impersonation, hijacking of devices, sessions, or authenticators, IP spoofing, and denial of service, and also to minimize the possibility of accidents, including, but not limited to: programming error, user error, inadvertent disclosure, and software malfunction.

(c) planning for adequate security of each information system as part of the agency management and planning processes, ensuring that appropriate officials are assigned responsibilities for security, periodically reviewing the security controls in their information systems, and authorizing system processing prior to operations, and periodically thereafter.

d. **References.** Website addresses that provide specifics regarding security requirements can be found in Appendix A.

4. PRIVACY REQUIREMENTS (INTERNET & INTRANET)

a. **Privacy Requirement.** VA websites must comply with applicable legal requirements concerning the privacy of individuals when they access VA web pages. Web pages material to the furnishing of personal information by website visitors are covered by the Privacy Act. The Privacy Act governs how federal agencies are to collect, use, disclose, store, and discard Privacy Act-protected information. Key privacy requirements for federal websites include:

(1) Posting privacy policies on each website.

(2) Posting a "Privacy Act Notice" on web pages covered by the Privacy Act that tells visitors the following:

(a) the authority which authorizes the solicitation of the information and whether disclosure of such information is mandatory or voluntary.

(b) the principal purpose or purposes for which VA intends to use the information collected.

(c) the routine uses which may be made of the information.

(d) the effects on the individual, if any, of not providing all or any part of the requested information.

(3) Translating privacy policies into a standardized machine-readable format.

(See Privacy Directive and Handbooks or go to http://www.va.gov/privacy/.)

b. **The Privacy Directive.** The directive that covers VA's privacy requirements, as well as the directive and handbook that cover Web Page Privacy Policy, can be found at http://www.va.gov/oirm/recdsmgmt/directives.htm.

c. **Internet Requirement.** All federal agencies must post or link to privacy policies on their principal web site, any known major entry points to their sites, and any web page that collects information from visitors to the website in individually identifiable form. In addition, the link may also appear on the page linked to by Web Policies & Important Links; this link to web policy information must be posted on all VA Internet web pages and does not preclude the need to post privacy links as stand-alone links as indicated. (See Links section of this Handbook.) VA webmasters must provide links to the Privacy Policy maintained by VA's Privacy Service at http://www.va.gov/privacy/ and not copy the text of the Privacy Policy and include that text on a discrete page. VA's Internet link is Privacy Policy which goes to the

General Web Page Privacy Policy at http://www.va.gov/privacy/. VA web managers must also certify annually in the VA Web Registry that their respective websites comply with all required Privacy policies and mandates. The General Policy explains how information collected via VA websites, pages and forms is to be collected, used, and maintained.   VA websites that collect information from users are subject to additional legal or regulatory requirements beyond those satisfied by the General Policy and must also include a link to an appropriate Limited Policy. The General Policy must be updated as necessary to ensure that it remains accurate and complete to the extent required by applicable law, regulation, or guidance.

   d. **Intranet Requirement**. The VA Intranet home page and all major entry point pages on the Intranet must include the link Intranet Privacy Policy which goes to the VA Intranet Web Page Privacy Notice at http://vaww.va.gov/privacy/, where the full text of the policy can be found. It is not necessary to copy the text of the notice on each web page. Warning notices about appropriate use of and restrictions for Intranet users must be posted at login and can be found in the Mandatory Approved Warning Notice section of this Handbook. Collections of information from individuals on the Intranet require an appropriate limited policy.

5. SECTION 508 ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS (INTERNET AND INTRANET)

   a. **Section 508 Compliance**. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that electronic and information technology provided by the Federal Government is accessible to persons with disabilities, including employees (Intranet) and members of the public (Internet) to the extent it does not pose an "undue burden." Section 508 addresses various means, tools, and methods for disseminating information, including computers, software, electronic office equipment, page design and attributes (e.g., the use of graphics, animation, moving images, fonts, page navigation, etc., as discussed in the Web Best Practices Guide). It applies to, but is not solely focused on, federal pages on the Internet or the World Wide Web and on the Intranet.

   b. **Application of Section 508 to Electronic and Information Technology (EIT)**

    (1) Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act applies to electronic and information technologies in the Federal sector, including those used for communication, duplication, computing, storage, presentation, control, transport and production. This includes computers, software, networks, peripherals and other types of electronic office equipment. The standards define *electronic and information technology*, in part, as "any equipment or interconnected system or subsystem of equipment, that is used in the creation, conversion, or duplication of data or information." In addition, it includes telecommunications products including telephones, information kiosks and transaction machines, world wide websites, and multimedia and office equipment such as copiers and fax machines and also includes the support services for computers, ancillary equipment, software, firmware and similar procedures and related resources.

   (2) The U.S. Access Board's Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards impact on people with disabilities who use VA's electronic and information technology including VA websites and VA web-based applications. VA web managers must ensure that the content and technical standards of all web pages and any documents made available on VA websites conform to Section 508 and the U.S. Access Board's accessibility

standards, specifically the requirements of Web-based Intranet and Internet Information and Applications (1194.22) which can be found at: http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=11#web/1194.22.

   c. **Section 508 Accessibility Requirement.** Accessibility is ensuring that content can be navigated and read by everyone, regardless of location, experience, or the type of computer technology used. VA web managers must ensure that all web pages and documents posted to the web must be accessible, including .pdf, .xls, .doc. Note: An MS Word document that is converted to a PDF for posting retains the structure to support access using a screen reader. A graphical pdf, pcx, jpg, tif, or bmp document, i.e., a scanned document in one of these graphical formats, however, is not in compliance unless the document has been run through a "paper capture" routine from Adobe Acrobat to make the graphical PDF accessible, or Optical Character Recognition (OCR) is utilized to produce readable text. Graphical PDF documents are otherwise considered to contain non-text elements which would need then to have an accompanying text equivalent. Web audit tools will be used to monitor compliance. The Section 508 Accessibility Office can assist with testing documents; recent versions of Adobe have a testing capability in their applications and the Adobe web site also has a testing capability.

   d. **Other Section 508 Requirements.** In addition to meeting the accessibility requirements, VA web managers must also:

   (1) Post links to Section 508 Accessibility information on specific Internet and Intranet pages. VA's link is Section 508 Accessibility. See Links section of this Handbook for details.

   (2) Certify annually on the VA Web Registry that their respective VA websites comply with Section 508.

   (3) Provide notice to blind or visually-impaired web visitors when the information they are viewing is in draft form by including the word "draft" in a text link to the documents. Web content managers must also ensure that the word "draft" is included in the text of the document(s) at or near the beginning of the document (subject, title, or in introductory paragraphs), or web content managers may attach a preface statement to the document that states in text that the document is a draft. It is not necessary to place this additional text on all other pages to satisfy this requirement. While marking each page with the word "draft" on all pages using headers or footers and/or watermarks are acceptable methods for sighted website visitors, those formats are not accessible to website visitors using screen readers. Questions about posting draft documents to the Internet should be addressed to appropriate VA web management officials (see Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook).

   e. **Links to detailed information regarding Section 508 Accessibility.** Links to information about Section 508 can be found in Appendix A.

   f. **Contacting VA's Accessibility Office.** For information, guidance, and testing assistance, contact Section508@va.gov or call 202-273-6543.

 6. **PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT (PRA): OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT & BUDGET (OMB) APPROVAL IS REQUIRED TO COLLECT INFORMATION ON VA INTERNET AND INTRANET WEBSITES.**

a. **Mandate.** OMB approval must be obtained prior to the collection of information from the public. Collections of information from VA Intranet users may fall within the scope of this requirement under some circumstances.

b. **Definition of Collection of Information.** Collection of information means the obtaining, causing to be obtained, soliciting, or requiring the disclosure to an agency, third parties or the public of information by or for an agency by means of identical questions posed to, or identical reporting, record-keeping, or disclosure requirements imposed on ten or more persons, whether such collection of information is mandatory, voluntary, or required to obtain or to retain a benefit. A collection of information may be in any form or format, including the use of report forms; application forms; schedules; questionnaires; surveys; reporting or record-keeping requirements; contracts; agreements; policy statements; plans; rules or regulations; planning requirements; circulars; directives; instructions; bulletins; requests for proposal or other procurement requirements; interview guides; oral communications; posting, notification, labeling, or similar disclosure requirements; telegraphic or telephonic requests; automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques; standard questionnaires used to monitor compliance with agency requirements; or any other techniques or technological methods used to monitor compliance with agency requirements.

c. **When and How to Obtain OMB Approval**: Prior to collecting information on any VA website, the VA office responsible for the website that will collect the information must, in accordance with VA Directive 6310 and VA Handbook 6310.2, determine if the PRA applies to the contemplated collection of information. The requirement also applies to copying all or part of a form previously approved by OMB for use, and using all or part of that collection form as a new collection of information on another website. The responsible office must contact the appropriate OMB liaison and obtain approval from OMB to proceed. If the OMB liaison determines that the collection activity falls under the PRA, the liaison will provide all the necessary information and instructions for obtaining OMB approval. Once OMB approval is received, the collection of information may proceed as directed by OMB through the VA liaison, and the website operator must post the PRA-required information and notices on the website. To determine the appropriate OMB clearance liaison for the website, contact the Associate Deputy for the Assistant Secretary for Information Technology (005E3), Records Management Service (RMS) in VACO (main phone number for Records Mgmt (RMS) is 202-565-7847). NCA employees can contact NCA Records Management Office at (202) 273-5184 or the Business Process Improvement Service at (202) 273-5164. Note: collections of information may involve rules that govern systems of records; contact VA's Records Management Service (RMS) in VACO for further information and also check the following links: [VA Handbook 6300.4, Procedures for Processing Requests for Records Subject to the Privacy Act](#) and [VA Handbook 6300.5, Procedures for Establishing & Managing Privacy Act Systems of Records](#).

7. POSTING FORMS TO VA WEBSITES. All forms, including electronic forms and forms that have or are required to have approval for use by OMB (see OMB Requirements for Collections of Information in this chapter), must conform to the requirements of VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures at http://vaww.va.gov/pubs/handbooks/Information-

Resources-Management-(IRM)/63101h.pdf   All forms must be approved by the Forms Management Offices of each administration and also approved by VA Forms Managers at VAFormsManagers@va.gov prior to posting on a VA website.

8. LINKS (INTERNET & INTRANET). VA website managers must post mandated links to Internet and Intranet pages as discussed in this Handbook. The following information pertains only to links and linking policies that are required. There are four categories of mandatory links. Category 1 covers links that must appear only on the agency home page; Category 2 covers links that must appear on the VA home page and on all major entry point pages; Category 3 covers links that must appear on all web pages; Category 4 covers links that must appear on the pages of specific VA websites or web pages that provide certain types of information. Links used by VA other than those mentioned in this section may be placed on any VA web pages as deemed appropriate by the web managers because they serve the mission of VA and are relevant and useful to VA's website visitors. VA web pages must have links that navigate to the appropriate pages above and below them, if any, in their appropriate organizational hierarchy.

a. **Definition of Hyperlink (also known as a link).** A hyperlink is a document formatting tag that allows documents or files to be linked by making certain words, phrases or graphics "clickable." Clicking on a hyperlink will direct the browser to another HTML page within the same directory, to another location on the current page, to another HTML page, to another file, or to another Internet or Intranet site. It is also known simply as a "link". Hyperlinks can be created by using absolute referencing and/or using relative referencing; see examples of each below. The two VA conventions for Internet addresses are www.va.gov and www.vba.va.gov. The VA conventions for Intranet addresses are vaww.va.gov and vbaw.vba.va.gov. Where an existing domain name is available, the web manager must use that domain name for addressing in lieu of the IP address. If a user requires a new domain name, existing agency domain naming rules must be used.

b. **Creating Hyperlinks**. There are two ways to create hyperlinks: absolute referencing and relative referencing. Relative referencing should be used whenever possible.

(1) Absolute referencing includes the entire web address in the hyperlink, beginning with "http://" and continuing through the entire extension of the file to be linked to. An example of an absolute reference is: <img src="Pics/owebtn.jpg" alt="Go to Debt Management web page" width="145" height="35" border="0">. In this example, the link is to a page that does not sit in the same root of the VBA main web server as the referring page.

(2) Relative referencing is a "shorthand" method of using a web address in a hyperlink. For this method to work, the web page referenced in the hyperlink MUST be in the same web space of the server as the referring page. The location of the referring page matters because it is the point from which the hyperlink is connected. Unlike the absolute reference, the relative reference hyperlink refers to a file's location within the directory hierarchy on the same server as the referring file. Therefore use of the "http://" in the address string is not required and one or more subdirectories of the path may not be required, again, depending on where the two files lie in relation to one another. An example of a relative reference is <img src="Pics/spanbenbtn.jpg" alt="Go to benefits information in Spanish and English" width="145" height="70" border="0">.   In this

example, the link is a clickable graphic that takes the user to a web page file that is physically located in the same root as the referring page on the Main VBA server.

   c. **Testing of Hyperlinks**. Hyperlinks must be tested on posting to VA web pages to ensure their viability and usability, and they must refer to the correct domain. Existing links must be reviewed by web managers no less than every six months to ensure the continuing integrity, objectivity, relevance, and usefulness of that linked site.
                                               .
   d. **Definition of a VA Major Entry Point.** Web pages that are frequently accessed directly by website visitors. Major entry points include:

   (1) Agency home page; http://www.va.gov/

   (2) An Administration's home page (NCA, VHA, and VBA home pages)

   (3) A website's home page

   (4) A program's home page; an example is My Health*e*Vet at http://www.myhealth.va.gov/

   (5) All pages linked directly from the VA home page including, but not limited to, the link to Life Insurance, Home Loan, Appeals, Compensation & Pension, Health Benefits.

   (6) Any other page that website statistics indicate are frequently visited or linked to by website visitors. Statistics on the most frequently accessed pages (based on the number of page views during a specified period of time) can be obtained from reports run on servers that host VA's web pages for VHA, VBA, NCA, etc. Reports with statistical data are available by clicking on the following links:

   (a) http://www.webstats.va.gov/ for Internet

   (b) http://vaww.webstats.va.gov/ for Intranet

   (c) http://www.statcounter.com/ for NCA statistics

   (d) http://philitc.vba.va.gov/iit/reports/WWW/xxx/123LogReport.htm/ for VBA statistics, with the exception of VBA Education. Note: That part of the string with "xxx" must be altered to include the name of the month for which the information is being gathered. If a change is made to the date in the URL string to the selected month, the results will provide the latest stats on usage (hits) for the top ten pages on the VBA server; for example, if the desired results are statistics for the month of May, the string would be:
http://philitc.vba.va.gov/iit/reports/WWW/may/123LogReport.htm/
How far to drill down to determine the number of most often-accessed pages (i.e., the top ten, top twenty, etc.) should be determined by each administration or organization in VA. Examples of high traffic pages include, but are not limited to, pages linked from the VA home page, VBA Regional Office home pages, VISN and medical center home pages, program office home pages.

   e. **General Link Requirements.**

(1) Links to sensitive information regarding procurement, human resources, or other information that is privileged and confidential must have restricted access and may not be posted to unsecured, open access VA Internet or Intranet. These types of information are protected information and must be secured by passwords that are assigned to specific persons or groups who need, and are authorized, to access this information.

(2) Links must not be created that connect to internal VA resources, such as servers, print servers or individual workstations, for example \\vaisw.xxx.

(3) Web managers must not place any Intranet links on any Internet pages. Intranet links incorrectly published on the Internet will manifest as broken links. Web managers must ensure that all website links are correct working links, and that Intranet links are not mistakenly moved to pages published on the Internet. They must also redact/remove internal hyperlinks prior to external publication. VA Web Operations or other web management officials (see the Who to Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook) may immediately remove any page or document containing Intranet links from Internet production servers. Web content managers will be notified and those pages will not be permitted to be restored until corrected.

(4) When links appear in horizontal rows on a web page, an individual hyperlink label must not break between rows.

(5) Separators/delimiters should not appear at the beginning or the end of a row, but must be used for separating links in a row**.**

(6) Links can be placed in horizontal rows, on side stripes, in footers, or on other suitable locations on web pages as long as their appearance fits into recommended page templates and styles.

(7) Font sizes of hyperlinks can be adjusted as necessary to fit into available space provided the sizing does not impair readability and visibility.

f. **External Links.** Any VA websites that link to sites external to VA by creating the link must ensure that no government or agency mandates or standards are violated. The following items must be considered before external links are created:

(1) Web managers must determine that external links are appropriate to VA's mission and are useful for VA's website visitors before placing the external links on a VA web page or allowing them to remain on an already published page. Agency links to commercial organizations or interest groups present special challenges with respect to maintaining agency objectivity and thus must be used judiciously. They may be posted only in accordance with the following requirements:

(a) VA web pages must not directly or indirectly endorse or promote any product or vendor; however, viewers, plug-ins and links that are required to access VA content and/or VA applications are permitted using links and icons. Banner displays that suggest an advertisement such as "Get Acrobat Now!" banners, "Get Flash Now" banners must not be used.

(b) The display of an external link must not demonstrate or give the appearance of favoritism to an external site when there are multiple sources of the same information.

(c) VA websites that display links to commercial search engines must avoid the appearance of endorsement or favoritism by linking to a page that lists and links to no fewer than three commercial search engines.   The display page must also have a disclaimer that says that the links to commercial services are for informational purposes only and do not constitute an endorsement by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(d) Disclaimer messages must appear when a web customer leaves the VA website for other locations that are NOT federal government sites (e.g., .com, .net, .edu); website visitors also must be told that VA is not responsible for the content of the site to which they are routed. Linking to sites that are part of the federal government, i.e., .gov or .mil, does not require using these disclaimers**.** Veterans and other web customers must be told that they are leaving a VA website, and that VA is not responsible for the content of the site to which they are routed. Mouseovers (see Glossary) or other less obtrusive technological alternatives will **not** suffice. VA webmasters must show customers a disclaimer prior to each external link or groupings of external links, and all disclaimers must contain, at a minimum, the following two elements:

(1) language that explains the user is about to leave a federal government site, AND

(2) language to the effect that this link does not represent any expressed or implied VA or federal government sponsorship or endorsement of the organization or the contents of its web page to which the URL is linked.

(e) The preferred method to meet the requirements of disclaimers is for each external non-federal government link or each table of multiple links, to have a Javascript popup that will appear with disclaimers that contain both elements as stated above in (e)(1) and (f)(2). Examples of pop-ups, for a single link and for multiple links to be included in the same disclaimer, are the following:

1. Example of single link disclaimer:

> ### You are now leaving the Department of Veterans Affairs Website
>
> VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the linked website.
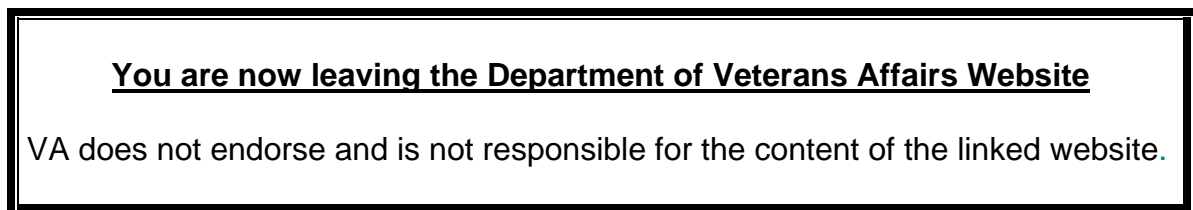
2. Example of multiple links disclaimer for links displayed together in a table:

You are now leaving the Department of Veterans Affairs Website

VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of any of the linked listed below.

First external link   Second external link   Third external link

---

(f) Any organization, government or non-government, to which a VA website has links (excluding mandated links) and whose posting is not considered relevant to VA's mission and/or useful to that website's visitors by appropriate VA officials, must be removed immediately from the website when directed to do so by appropriate VA officials at that site and/or by VA web management officials. See Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook.

g. **Links for the Internet.** The types of links that may be placed on Internet pages are:

(1) Required Links**:** All the links cited below and their required locations on VA web pages are required by law.

(2) Other Links**:** VA uses links other than those mandated by law that are specifically listed in this section of the Handbook. Other links may be displayed on web pages at the discretion of local webmasters, content managers, or their management, and must meet all general links policies and requirements.

(3) Catch-all Hyperlink**:** Some specific required links may appear on a single reference document represented by a "catch-all" hyperlink rather than each one being displayed separately. VA has an Internet web page that has these links; the link to access this page is Web Policies & Important Links and must be displayed on all VA Internet web pages. This web page contains brief explanations of and links to VA's disclaimer link (Disclaimer), the Accessibility link (Section 508 Accessibility), the security link (Security Protocols to Protect Information), the link to Section 515 Information Quality information (Information Quality), the link to information about digital rights copyrights, trademarks, and patent rights (Digital Rights, Copyright, Trademark, and Patent Laws), the No Fear Link (No Fear Act), the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act), the schedule for publishing information (Web Content Inventory and Publication Schedule), VA's Internet Privacy policy (Privacy Policy), and VA's policy regarding the use of links to other information (Policy on Links to Other Information). All other mandatory links cited in the information below are required to be stand-alone links and are not permitted to be placed on this catch-all page.

(4) Internet web page categories and attendant mandatory links for each category are as follows:

(a) Category 1. VA Home Page only at http://www.va.gov/. The following links are required to appear on the VA home page. They are not required to appear on any other pages although they may be used elsewhere if determined to be useful by website managers.

1. USA Freedom Corps

2. White House

3. Freedom of Information Act (This link must appear as a stand-alone link on the VA home page in addition to being contained in the catch-all link that must be posted to all Internet pages and provided on the page linked to by the Contact the VA link.)

4. VA Forms

(b) Category 2. Links that must appear on the VA home page AND on all major entry point pages. These links are not required to appear on any other pages on VA websites, but they can be used elsewhere if determined to be useful by website managers:

1. Annual Performance and Accountability Report

2. About VA

3. FirstGov

4. Site Map (This link must appear on all VA Internet home pages: links to site maps pertaining to individual websites must have a label that distinguishes it from the department link)

5. Contact the VA   (This link routes directly to the IRIS at https://iris.va.gov/ home page which provides required links to specific types of information.)

6. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

7. Privacy Policy (Use this link for the Internet only; do not confuse it with the Intranet Privacy Policy which is to be used exclusively on the Intranet.) This link must also appear on any web page that contains specific types of information that require that the policy or a link to the policy be placed on the web page, and must appear on any web page that collects information from individuals per the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act. PDF files are exempt from this linking requirement. (Note: Per ICGI recommendations, this link is also included in the Catch-all Hyperlink, Web Policies & Important Links, that must be posted to all Internet web pages. Use of the Catch-all Hyperlink on all Internet web pages does not preclude the need to post this link as a stand-alone link on the VA home page, major entry pages or specifically designated pages as indicated.)

8. Small Business Contacts (This link must also be displayed on the webpage linked to by the Contact the VA link.)

(c) Category 3. Links that must appear on all Internet web pages.

1. VA Home (All Internet pages except the VA home page; individual VA websites must have a link to its website home page on all of its pages.)

2. Facilities Locator

3. Search (Web managers may also display links to a search capability specifically for their local VA websites; the label for that link must distinguish it from the VA search capability)

4. Web Policies & Important Links

(d) **Category 4** Other Internet Links that must appear on individual VA websites and/or on specific web pages:

1. Every VA component that issues regulations must provide information about those regulations on its Internet website and also link to the Regulations.gov portal**.**

2. VA websites must link to appropriate cross-agency portals when applicable to guide the visitors to additional resources that exist across the U.S. government. Examples of cross-agency portals are the FirstGov link (required on the VA home page and all major entry point pages), GovBenefits.gov which provides information about availability of federal and state government benefits, and Seniors.Gov which provides information material to the elderly.

3. Every VA component that provides grants or has contracting opportunities must provide information about those opportunities on its website and must link to Grants.gov and any other appropriate cross-agency portals, such as http://www.firstgov.gov/ which has links to the Small Business Administration, the Minority Business Development Agency, and many other organizations and sources of information.

4. The VA Jobs website, Job Opportunities, must have a link to USA.Jobs on its home page.

5. Contact Us Links. VA web managers must post a link to contact their own VA websites; this link may be labeled Contact Us, Contact This Website, or other suitable label to distinguish it from the Contact the VA link. The link label must be the same as the title of the page to which it links. The website's link must be employed in one of the following ways:

a. route to a web page that provides website information, including website phone numbers, website e-mail addresses, website-relevant street addresses (if any), contact information to report technical, content, and/or accessibility problems with the website, links to other significant website information, a link to the IRIS at https://iris.va.gov/ for any information not relevant to the website, and any other information as deemed appropriate by website managers.

b. **OR** provide a link to the webmaster's or other website manager's generic e-mail address to report problems with the website and also link to the IRIS at https://iris.va.gov/ for all other types of inquiries not material to the operation of the website,

c. **OR** the VA organization must have an electronic system that provides an electronic tracking mechanism for inquiries that come through the Contact Us links on a specific website and must also provide a link to the IRIS at https://iris.va.gov/ for issues not material to the website.

Caution: if website managers choose to develop a form for website visitors to complete when they contact a VA website directly or to copy all or part of an approved form that exists on another website, the website managers must contact their OMB liaison for instructions and OMB permission to collect information prior to posting the form on their own website. In addition, collections of information may involve rules concerning Systems of Records; contact Records Management Service for information about Systems of Records (See OMB Approvals section and the Who To Contact section in Appendix A. Also see Glossary for definition of "system of records".)

6. The No Fear Act link, which is displayed on the Internet as The No Fear Act, links to http://www.va.gov/orm/NOFEAR-Select.asp and must be posted as a stand-alone link on the VA Job Opportunities home page in addition to being listed in the catch-all link, Web Policies & Important Links, that must be posted on VA Internet web pages.

7. The Español link provides access to benefit and compensation brochures that are written in English and in Spanish. This link may be posted wherever it is considered useful.

h. **Links for the Intranet.** Intranet web page categories and attendant mandatory links for each category are shown below. Other links appropriate to the Intranet may be displayed on Intranet web pages at the discretion of local webmasters, content managers, or their management if determined to be useful to Intranet website visitors and appropriate to VA's mission. Those links must meet all general links policies and requirements.

(1) **Category 1**. The Intranet home page only must have the following link: a link to the Intranet search engine at http://vaww.index.va.gov/search/.

(2) **Category 2.** The Intranet home page and all Intranet major entry point pages on the Intranet must have the links specified below.

(a) Section 508 Accessibility (this is the Intranet link for Section 508 Accessibility; the link of the same name listed in the Internet section is accessible only to the Internet.)

(b) Intranet Privacy Policy (Note: this hyperlink goes to an Intranet link and must not be used on the Internet; the Privacy Policy hyperlink listed for the Internet goes to an Internet page. Each has its own privacy policy.) In addition to the Intranet home page and all major entry point pages, the Privacy link must be displayed whenever the content of a web page requires that it must be displayed on that page. Contact the Privacy Office for instructions.

(c) No Fear Act (this link should not be confused with the No Fear Act link for the Internet. This Intranet link goes to material about discrimination, whistleblower protections, grievance procedures, etc., for employees.) This link must also appear on any VA Intranet websites that contain information about employment or other Human Resources issues.

(3) **Category 3.** All Intranet pages must have the following link: VA Intranet Home (or VHA, VBA, NCA Intranet Home). Other appropriate links may appear on Intranet pages as determined by webmasters, content managers, and/or their management to be useful, necessary, and relevant to VA's mission.

(4) **Category 4.** There are no required links for the Intranet in this category.

9. MANDATORY WARNING NOTICES. Warning notices must be posted on Internet and Intranet web pages as described in this section. Warning notices are required in addition to any privacy or other notices on a VA website.

a. **Required Approval Prior to Use.** The use of the four warning notices identified in "8d. Placement of Warning Notices and Example of Notices are approved for use and must be used without modification. If a web manager decides to create his/her own warning notice(s), s/he must include all required legal elements in that warning notice; notices must be approved in advance of posting by VA legal counsel.

b. **Required Elements of Warning Notices.** Warning notices shall contain the following elements:

(1) The website and/or content are part of the VA, VA computer systems, federal government computer systems, or similar VA or federal networking resources. All use is considered to constitute understanding and acceptance that there is no reasonable expectation of privacy for any data or transmissions on government networks or systems.

(2) The website is for viewing and retrieving information except as otherwise explicitly authorized (also state if specific restrictions apply, such as access is restricted to certain authorized groups or application users).

(3) The use of the VA system and all data transmitted through this system are subject to review and action including, but not limited to, monitoring, recording, retrieving, copying, auditing, inspecting, investigating, restricting access, blocking, tracking, disclosing to authorized personnel, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel and in accordance with VA Privacy policies.

(4) All activity is subject to monitoring, storage, retrieval, disclosure, analysis, restriction of access, investigation, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel.

(5) All use is considered to constitute understanding and acceptance of all terms and considered to be consent to monitoring, storage, retrieval, disclosure, analysis, restriction of access, investigation, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel.

(6) All unauthorized use is subject to action that may result in criminal, civil, or administrative penalties.

c. **Other Elements.**

(1) Other elements may be included in warning notices as long as they do not appear to restrict authorized actions by either VA or law enforcement personnel. Include wording such as "including, but not limited to," or ". . . or other applicable laws." or "...or any other authorized actions" where appropriate.

(2) Do not cite Acts or Public Laws as possible criminal laws that apply because the statute(s) that result from those Acts/Public Laws would be enforced and may be amended

by future Acts or Public Laws. For example, do not cite the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act of 1986 as it amended 18 U.S.C. §1030, which has since been significantly amended -- cite 18 U.S.C. §1030 instead.

   d. **Placement of Warning Notices and Examples of Warning Notices.** The warning notices in this section of the Handbook shall be placed as described for each notice. The fonts and font sizes used in these examples are not mandatory; however, the fonts and font sizes used must permit the average person to read the text. The boxes/bordering around the warning notices in this section are not required and are only used here to visually block off each warning notice.

   (1) Warning Notice for Public Internet Presence.

   (a) This notice must appear on every Internet web page in the site. The notice must appear as either:

   1. a link to a separate page containing the notice in its entirety (recommended) and which is specifically labeled Warning Notice or contains "Warning Notice" in its label, or

   2. complete text on the page.

   (b) The warning notice or link to the warning notice must appear on **every** Internet web page that meets either of the following criteria:

   1. If a web page was created to be a source document, that web page must also display the warning notice.

   2. If a web page links to a source document (e.g. press release, VA's accountability Report, OIG reports), the web page that displays the link to that source document must display the warning notice. This requirement applies even when the warning notice is already included on the source document that is linked from that web page.

An example of a Warning Notice for VA's Public Internet Presence is as follows and is contained inside the bordered space:

This site is intended for use by the public for viewing and retrieving public information only except as otherwise explicitly authorized. VA information resides on and transmits through computer systems and networks funded by VA; all use is considered to be understanding and acceptance that there is no reasonable expectation of privacy for any data or transmissions on Government networks or systems. See http://www.va.gov/privacy for further information on privacy.

All transactions that occur on VA systems other than the viewing and downloading of information on VA websites may be subject to review and action including (but not limited to) monitoring, recording, retrieving, copying, auditing, inspecting, investigating, restricting access, blocking, tracking, disclosing to authorized personnel, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel. The use of this system constitutes the understanding and acceptance of these terms.

Unauthorized attempts or acts to either (1) access, upload, change, or delete information on this system, (2) modify this system, (3) deny access to this system, or (4) accrue resources for unauthorized use on this system are strictly prohibited and may be considered violations subject to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties.

   (2) Warning Notice for Intranet or Extranet (non-public) Presence.

    (a) This notice must appear on **every** web page on the site, without exception. The notice may appear as either:

     1. a link to a separate page containing the notice in its entirety (recommended), or

     2. complete text on the page.

    (b) The warning notice or link to the warning notice must appear on **every** Internet or Extranet web page that meets either of the following criteria:

     1. If a web page was created to be a source document, that web page must also display the warning notice.

     2. If a web page links to a source document (e.g. press release, VA's accountability Report, OIG reports) the web page that displays the link to that source document must display the warning notice. This applies even when the warning notice is already included on the source document that is linked from that web page.

An example of a Warning Notice for VA's Intranet or Extranet (non-public) Presence is as follows and is contained inside the bordered area:

This site is intended to be used by [*authorized VA network users <or> authorized users of Example Corporation/Example University*] for viewing and retrieving information only except as otherwise explicitly authorized. VA information resides on and transmits through computer systems and networks funded by VA; all use is considered to be understanding and acceptance that there is no reasonable expectation of privacy for any data or transmissions on Government Intranet or Extranet (non-public) networks or systems.

All transactions that occur on this system other than the viewing and downloading of website information and all data transmitted through this system are subject to review and action including (but not limited to) monitoring, recording, retrieving, copying, auditing, inspecting, investigating, restricting access, blocking, tracking, disclosing to authorized personnel, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel. All use of this system constitutes understanding and unconditional acceptance of these terms.

Unauthorized attempts or acts to either (1) access, upload, change, or delete information on this system, (2) modify this system, (3) deny access to this system, or (4) accrue resources for unauthorized use on this system are strictly prohibited. Such attempts or acts are subject to action that may result in criminal, civil, or administrative penalties.

(3) Application Warning Notice. This notice applies to a web page restricted to those authorized/allowed to conduct electronic transactions with (or within) the VA. This would include a web page for online benefit applications, online job applications, or online contract proposal bidding. This warning notice must appear either at the top of the web page or immediately next to (below) the application, form, entry field, or other submittal part within the web page. If the transaction or application spans more than one page, the warning notice must appear on each page (for example, to complete an online form, a user must go through three Web pages to complete it -- an application warning notice must appear on all three pages). Additionally, the warning notice requirements of paragraph 9d(1) (for public Websites) or paragraph 9d(2) (for Intranets/Extranets) still apply.

An example of an Application Warning Notice is as follows and is contained inside the bordered area below:

WARNING: This [site/page] is restricted to use only by customers of the Department of Veterans Affairs [*name of benefit program/staff office/etc.*] for viewing and retrieving information only except as otherwise authorized. All use is monitored for authorized purposes, and any use constitutes consent to monitoring, storage and retrieval, disclosure, analysis, access restriction, investigation, or any other authorized actions. Any unauthorized access (or denial of access) to this system, all files, and all data therein is prohibited and is subject to criminal, civil, and administrative penalties under Federal Laws including, but not limited to, 18 U.S.C. §1030 (fraud and related activity in connection with computers) and 18 U.S.C. §2701 (unlawful access to stored communications). In addition, Federal Laws (18 USC 287 and 1001) provide for criminal penalties for knowingly submitting or making false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims.

(4). Access Control Warning Notice - access to a site/directory restricted to certain authorized VA staff (or other authorized individuals). This would include a web page for online

portals to VA computer resources (such as Human Resources or other VA systems), Intranet sites set up for specific offices, or sites set up for access by authorized groups or individuals. This warning notice must appear either at the top of the Web page or immediately next to or below an application, form, entry field, link, or other submittal part within the Web page that takes the user further into the restricted site. Further, it must appear on every Web page (in any location) in the restricted site/directory. Additionally, the warning notice requirements of paragraph 9d(1) (for public websites) or paragraph 9d(2) (for Intranets/Extranets) still apply.

An example of an Access Control Warning Notice is as follows and is contained inside the bordered area:

WARNING: This site and all subdirectories and files within are restricted to authorized Department of Veterans Affairs, [*name of staff office or program*] staff only. All use is monitored for authorized purposes, and any use constitutes consent to monitoring, storage and retrieval, disclosure, analysis, access restriction, investigation, or any other authorized actions. Any unauthorized access (or denial of access) to this system, all files, and all data therein is prohibited and is subject to criminal, civil, and administrative penalties under Federal Laws including, but not limited to, 18 U.S.C. §1030 (fraud and related activity in connection with computers) and 18 U.S.C. §2701 (unlawful access to stored communications). In addition, Federal Laws (18 USC 287 and 1001) provide for criminal penalties for knowingly submitting or making false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims.

CHAPTER 7. ENTERPRISE TOOLS

1. VA ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (ECMS) (INTERNET; WILL EXPAND TO INTRANET)

    a. **Background.** The VA Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) provides webmasters and content authors with a number of options for authoring content and website development. The ECMS provides automated support of business processes such as content review and approval, change control for tracking and managing updates (versioning, rollback), and compliance verification for specific VA standards and requirements.

    b. **ECMS Requirement.** Web content is to be managed by the Enterprise Content Management System, hosted at the Enterprise Data Centers as outlined by the Web Hosting and Consolidation Initiative (WH/CI). This tool must be used by all VA Internet and Intranet websites as its use is made available across VA; existing web development tools should be used until VA websites are included in ECMS. Information about ECMS and its implementation is available at http://vaww.va.gov/cms/ or by contacting the mailgroup at VAWebCMSSupport@va.gov. This website provides documentation on approved strategies and methods for implementation of the tool as well as user documentation.

2. INQUIRY ROUTING & INFORMATION SYSTEM (IRIS) (INTERNET)

    a**. Background.** The Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS) is a One-VA Internet-based, customer relations management tool accessed by the public via the Contact the VA link; this tool is approved and supported by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. The Contact the VA link routes to the IRIS homepage at https://iris.va.gov where links to specific types of information can be found and where VA website visitors can create and submit inquiries to VA. The use of this tool satisfies the mandate that certain types of information must be provided to the public on all federal public websites and that all federal websites must provide a mechanism to communicate with the agency via electronic means.

    b. **IRIS requirement for VA Internet websites.** The Contact the VA link must be placed on the VA home page and all major entry point pages; in addition, web managers must also put the link to the IRIS at https://iris.va.gov/ on their website's contact page, if any, or if a website provides its own electronic system for receiving e-communications from the public via the Internet, the IRIS link must also be posted to that website wherever appropriate to ensure that website customers can gain access to VA information not otherwise found on the individual website. See the Links section for details. Note: While the IRIS routes Internet inquiries to organizations throughout VHA, VBA, NCA and many program offices, not all organizations participate in the IRIS.   VA organizations not already participating in the IRIS are encouraged to do so.

3. COMPLIANCE MONITORING TOOL (INTERNET & INTRANET)

    a. **Description of compliance monitoring tool.** VA web managers and appropriate VA management officials must ensure that all VA web pages meet all government-wide and agency requirements. To assist in this process and to enhance VA's oversight capability, VA implemented an automated compliance monitoring tool that continually scans all of VA's web

pages in production to ensure compliance with many of these requirements. A scan cycle is completed when all VA web pages have been reviewed, at which time reports of the findings of a scan cycle are produced by the monitoring tool and a new scan cycle begins. Monthly scan cycle reports must be downloaded or reviewed online by web managers and by appropriate VA management officials every month; reports and other information can be found at http://vaww.webxm.va.gov/. In addition, scans will be conducted automatically for sites migrated into the ECMS system whenever there is a promotion request to move content from development to production servers to ensure compliance with requirements within the purview of this tool prior to the publication of a web page or website. Corrective action must be initiated by web managers as soon as problems with compliance requirements become apparent. Failure to make necessary corrections in a timely manner may result in the removal of web pages or entire VA websites until compliance is assured. The compliance-monitoring tool is a diagnostic tool that does NOT fix any problems that it finds.

   b. **Reports generated by Compliance Monitoring Tool.** Reports generated by this tool can be found at http://vaww.webxm.va.gov/ and include spelling errors, broken links, application defects, compliance problems with accessibility, privacy, trademarks and copyrights, and security, and the currency of web pages that must be reviewed or updated every 12 months and that are not historical or archival.

RESOURCES TO ASSIST WEBSITE MANAGERS

1. VA INTRANET WEBSITES FOR WEB MANAGERS

   a. **VA Intranet 6102 website.** The website for all 6102 documents is
http://vaww.va.gov/6102/. Items posted to this Intranet site include the current version of VA
Handbook 6102, VA Directive 6102, VA Web Best Practices Guide, links to metadata
information, and other documents and links relevant to 6102.

   b. **Other websites and reference links for web managers.**

   (1) VA OSS Web Solutions - http://vaww.va.gov/websolutions/ (Provides overall
coordination and support for VA's Intranet and Internet web activities.)

   (2) VA OSS Web Operations - http://vaww.va.gov/webops/ (includes page templates and
images and How To Tips.)

   (3) VA Web Request – http://vaww.va.gov/webrequest/ (Provides and forwards a form to
obtain permission to create a new website and/or to change an existing website, for example,
transferring an existing site from one location to another or from one format to another.)

   (4) VA Web Registry – http://vaww.va.gov/webregistry/ (Website on which all production
websites in VA must be registered.)

   (5) Section 508 Accessibility References:

    (a) Section 508 Accessibility - http://www.va.gov/accessible/

   (b) Software Applications and Operating Systems (1194.21) -
http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=11#software/

   (c) Web-based Intranet and Internet Information and Applications (1194.22) -
http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=11#web/

   (d) Telecommunications Products (1194.23)   Currently, not all telecommunications
products integrate into to web-based internet and Intranet technologies. However, with the
development of voice over IP technology, the application of these standards with respect to
1194.21 and 1194.22 may change. Video or Multimedia Products (1194.24) -
http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=Content&ID=11#video/

   (e) VA Directive 6221 & VA Handbook 6221, Accessible Electronic and Information
Technology (EIT) –http://www.va.gov/pubs/directives/Information-Resources-Management-
(IRM)/6221.htm.

   (6) VA Search for the Internet - http://www.index.va.gov/

   (7) VA Search for the Intranet - http://vaww.index.va.gov/

(8) Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) - http://vaww.va.gov/cms/

(9) Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS website - http://vaww.va.gov/irisinfo/

(10) Web XM – http://vaww.webxm.va.gov/

(11) Internet Web Search Improvement Project (VAWSIP) - http://vaww.va.gov/vawebsearch/

(12) Security References:

(a) NIST SP 800-44, Guidelines on Securing Public Web Servers - http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/.

(b) NIST SP 800-53, Recommended Security Controls for Federal Information Systems at http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/ and NIST SP 800-53A, regarding Assessment Methods and Procedures at http://csrc.nist.gov/sec-cert/ca-verification.html/.

(c) NIST SP 800-37, Guide for the Security Certification and Accreditation of Federal Information Systems - http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/.

(d) FIPS 199, Standards for Security Categorization of Federal Information and Information Systems - http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/fips/fips199/FIPS-PUB-199-final.pdf/.

(e) FIPS 140-2, Security Requirements for Crytographic Modules – http://www.csrc.nist.gov/publications/fips/fips140-2/fips1402.pdf/

(13) Privacy Act policies – http://www.va.gov/privacy/ and http://vaww.va.gov/privacy/

(14) VA Enterprise Architecture – http://vaww.va.gov/oit/eam

(15) VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures - http://vaww.va.gov/pubs/handbooks/Information-Resources-Management-(IRM)/63101h.pdf

(16) Handbook Reference Websites - http://www.firstgov.gov/webcontent/index.shtml,

(17) VA Web Best Practices Guide reference website- Federal website best practices from the Interagency Committee on Government Information - http://www.firstgov.gov/webcontent/shoulddo_bestpractices.shtml/

(18) Snippets - http://vaww.teamshare.va.gov/snippets/ (This website is for the VA Web/Programming community for sharing useful code snippets.)

(19) Monthly Webmaster Conference Call Information - http://vaww.teamshare.va.gov/webmaster/

2. **WHO TO CONTACT**

   a. General questions should be addressed to the appropriate contacts below:

   (1) VHA: VHA Web Communications group at vhawebcommunications@va.gov

   (2) VBA: VBA Web Administrator at vba.web.administrator@vba.va.gov

   (3) NCA: National Cemetery Administration at *public.inquiry@va.gov*

   (4) All other organizations not under the purview of VHA, VBA or NCA: VA 6102 OSS Staff at VA6102oss@va.gov

   b. Subject matter and other guidance may be addressed to:

   (1) VA's Section 508 Accessibility Office at Section508@va.gov or call 202-273-6543

   (2) Office of Information & Technology's Records Management Service (RMS) in VACO (005E3) The RMS main phone number is 202-565-7847.

   (3) Privacy Office at vaco005P4staff@va.gov

   (4) VA Forms Managers at VAFormsManagers@va.gov

   (5) VA Web Operations at vhaiswebops@med.va.gov

   (6) VA Web Solutions at vawebsolutionsoffice@va.gov

   (7) VA IRIS System Administration Group at vairissysadmin@med.va.gov

   (8) VA Web CMS Support at VAWebCMSSupport@va.gov

   (9) VHA Public Affairs Office at vhapublicaffairsofficers@va.gov

3. **VA WEB BEST PRACTICES GUIDE**

   a.   **Description of VA Web Best Practices Guide (BPG).** This guide is for VA employees and contractors who work with technical and/or content aspects of preparing and maintaining VA Internet and Intranet websites and provides web managers with an overview of best practice elements for their VA websites. It can be found at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS
6102 Definitions, Acronyms and Abbreviations

1. **508 Compliance:** Meeting all mandates required by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 794d) to ensure that all web pages are accessible to disabled persons.

2. **ABG:** Access Board Guidelines

3. **Accessibility:** Ensuring that content can be navigated and read by everyone, regardless of location, experience, or the type of computer technology used. Creating accessible content must be an integral part of the web design philosophy, and accessibility features must be incorporated into all aspects of the design process.

4**. Alternative Formats:** Web file formats that are not universally accessible but are available to the public via specific software or plug-ins. These formats include, but are not limited to: Portable Document Formats (PDF), WordPerfect, MS Word, MS PowerPoint, and statistical data files, such as SAS, SPSS, SQL, and MS Excel.

5. **Alternative Text:** Instructions included in the HTML tags for graphics that describe what the graphic is and a methodology widely used because it enables sight-impaired people to "see" the graphics. When alternative (alt) text is included, a yellow text box with the description will appear when a user holds their mouse over a graphic.

6. **Auditing:** The process used by an operating system to detect and record security-related events in a secure, pass-worded file known as a security log; types of entries include, but are not limited to, an attempt to create, access, or delete objects such as files and directories.

7**. Authentication:** Confirmation of the identity of a party involved in data transmission which is a process that determines a user's identity, as well as determining what a user is authorized to access, e.g. a financial database or a support knowledgebase. The most common form of authentication is user name and password, although this also provides the lowest level of security.

8. **Authorization of trusted devices:** The process of deciding if device X is allowed to have access to service Y. This is where the concept of trusted devices exists. Trusted devices (devices are authenticated and indicated as "trusted") are allowed access to services. Untrusted or unknown devices may require authorization based on user interaction before being granted access to the services. This does not principally exclude the automatic authorization given by an application. Authorization always includes authentication.

9. **Availability:** Ensuring timely and reliable access to and use of information. A loss of availability is the disruption of access to or use of information or an information system.

10. **BMP:** The standard bit-mapped graphics format used in the Windows environment. By convention, graphics files in the BMP format end with a.*BMP* extension. Click on links in this definition for more information.

11. **Branding:** Branding is defined as those items that identify the Department on its web pages through its look and feel such as logos, templates, font and font sizes and other items that aid in identifying the website as a VA website; see the VA Web Best Practices Guide at http://vaww.va.gov/6102/ for details.

12**. Broken Graphic:** A graphic that does not appear when a web page loads. When an image doesn't load, the alt text or some generic icon shapes are displayed instead.

13. **Broken Link:** A hyperlink to a non-existent or non-operational page or server; also known as a "dead link."

14. **Browser:** Short for web browser, a software application used to locate and display web pages. Technically, a browser is a client program that uses the medium of Hypertext Transfer Protocol to submit tasks to web servers connected to the Internet to retrieve requested information.

15**. CFM:** Acronym for Macromedia's ColdFusion, an application used for developing web applications and which uses .cfm for its suffix.

16**. CFR:** Code of Federal Regulations

17. **Confidentiality:** Preserving authorized restrictions on information access and disclosure, including the means for protecting both personal privacy and proprietary information so that it is accessed only by authorized persons.

18**. Content:** Information on websites visitors; this information and its presentation must be consistent with VA's communications and public affairs policies, procedures and organization messages. For the purposes of this document, content does not include overall page attributes such as branding, font size, etc., which must be standardized as defined in this document. See definition of static web content and dynamic web content below:

    a. Static web content consists of information in the form of "web documents" that are rendered identically each time they are accessed.

    b. Dynamic web content consists of information that is rendered differently based on specific user input or a program or script, and is usually managed in a database associated with a server.

19. **Content Management:** Ensuring that information posted to VA web pages complies with all legal and Handbook requirements and is current, factual, spell-checked and grammatically correct. The content for publication must be approved by appropriate VA management.

20. **Cookies:** A message given to a web browser by a web server. The browser stores the message in a text file and the message is then sent back to the server each time the browser requests a page from the server. When the user's computer consults the originating server computer, the cookie is sent back to the server, allowing it to respond to the user's browser according to the cookie's contents, for example to enable automatic logon with username and

password, or to store user specific variables during an application session. There are two types of cookies as defined as follows:

 a. session cookies are small files that contain information about a user and which are stored only in temporary memory and then automatically erased when the web browser is closed.

 b. persistent cookies are small files containing information about a user which are stored permanently until steps are taken to manually erase them.

21. **Cross-Agency Portal:** A website that brings together information and services from multiple federal agencies or organizations about a particular topic or for a particular audience.

22. **CSS (Cascading Style Sheets):** A format used to separate style from structure on Web pages; it is a feature of HTML that defines how different elements, such as headers, links, and text will appear, for example defining fonts, colors, paragraph spacing, etc. Style sheets can be applied to any page or all pages on a particular website.

23. **Document:** A file provided on a website that contains text, such as pages, text files, word-processing files, and spreadsheet files.

24. **Document Management:** Organizing existing documents and making them easier to share internally in a given organization.

25. **Domain Names:** A unique name that identifies an Internet or Intranet site and which consists of a sequence of characters separated by periods such as www.xxx.xxx or vaww.xxx.xxx. Top-level domains include .gov, .mil, .us, .org, .com, and .edu. The .gov domain name is reserved for non-military, United States Federal Government institutions. The domain name for all Department of Veterans Affairs websites is va.gov.

26. **Domain Name Service (DNS):** A meaningful and easy-to-remember name for an Internet address. The DNS is the way that Internet domain names are located and translated into IP (Internet Protocol) addresses. Every computer on the Internet has a unique IP address.

27. **Download:** To copy something from a primary source to a more peripheral one, as in saving something found on the web to a file on an individual's local hard drive.

28. **ECMS (Enterprise Content Management System):** Software that enables authorized staff to manage the creation, modification, and removal of content from a website. Also referred to as CMS.

29. **Email (e-mail):** Electronic mail; the transmission of messages over communications networks.

30. **Enterprise:** An enterprise consists of all functional departments, people, and systems within an organization.

31. **Extranet:** A public-private website or portal, secured or password-protected, specifically designed for selected workers in an organization and selected external partners to conduct internal business.

32. **FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)**: List of common questions and answers designed to save users time and effort when looking for help.

33. **Federal Public Website:** Any website that:

    a. Is funded and sponsored entirely by a federal agency or organization,

    b. Presents official government information, and

    c. Is available to the public without passwords or log-ins.

34. **Firewall:** A dedicated device (hardware and/or software) placed between internal and external networks to control access and prevent misuse or abuse.

35. **FOIA (Freedom of Information Act):** Title 5 of the United States Code, section 552, provides that, upon request, federal agencies, Congress, and the Courts must provide copies of records in its custody as implemented in the agency's FOIA regulations and policies.

36. **Frames:** The simultaneous display of several HTML files on a web page. A web page that has frames will normally display a navigational tool bar that remains constant through an entire site in one section of the page and content in another section.

37. **FTP (File Transfer Protocol):** A protocol which allows a user on one host to access and transfer files to and from another host over a network. FTP is the standard method for exchanging files between computers on the Internet.

38. **GIF (Graphics Interchange Format):** A compressed image file format that displays quickly on a web page.

39. **GUI (Graphical User Interface):** A visual, icon-driven interface for an operating system or other computer application, elements can include windows, icons, buttons, cursors and scroll bars.

40. **Home:** The primary page or starting point reached through the URL.

41. **Home page:** The main page of a website. Typically, the home page serves as an index or table of contents to other documents stored at the site. The home page is described as a single document but can contain multiple screens. By convention the home page provides consistent access to the major content areas of the website.

42. **HTML (Hypertext Markup Language)**: The authoring language used to create documents on the World Wide Web. HTML defines the structure and layout of a Web document by using a variety of tags and attributes. Browsers are programmed to interpret HTML for display.

43. **HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol):** the underlying set of rules that enables web browsing that is used by the World Wide Web. This protocol defines how messages are formatted and transmitted, and what actions web servers and browsers must take in response to various commands. For example, when a URL is entered in a browser, it sends an HTTP command to the web server directing it to fetch and transmit the requested web page.

44. **HTTPS (Hypertext Transfer Protocol over Secure Socket Layer, or HTTP over SSL)**: HTTPS encrypts and decrypts the page requests and page information between the client browser and the web server using a Secure Socket Layer (SSL). HTTPS by default uses port 443 as opposed to the standard HTTP port of 80. URL's beginning with HTTPS indicate that the connection between client and browser is encrypted using SSL.

45. **Hyperlink:** A document formatting tag that allows documents or files to be linked by making certain words, phrases or graphics "clickable." Clicking on a hyperlink will direct the browser to another HTML page within the same directory, to another location on the current page, to another HTML page, to another file, or to another Internet or Intranet site. Also known simply as a "link". Hyperlinks can be created by using absolute referencing and/or using relative referencing; see examples of each in the Handbook section about hyperlinks.

46. **Industry Standard Web Formats:** Web file formats that are universally accessible to anyone with a web browser, which do not require specific software or plug-ins. HTML and XML are current examples of industry standard formats.

47. **Information Architecture:** Structuring, organizing, and labeling information in a manner that is logical and meaningful to the recipients of that information. This process includes mapping the path for users to take when they visit a website and want to obtain information or to accomplish a task, and also how to arrange the vast amount of information that VA offers on its website. Sometimes referred to as IA.

48. **Integrity:** Guarding against unauthorized information modification or destruction of information, includes ensuring information non-repudiation and authenticity. A loss of integrity is the unauthorized modification or destruction of information.

49. **Internet:** A global digital infrastructure that connects millions of computers with cross platform compatibility, using the Internet Protocol (IP) to communicate between computers.

50. **Internet Service:** A network-based information service including http, gopher, ftp, mailto, news, and telnet (ex. web pages, email forums, chat rooms, listservers.)

51. **Intranet:** A private website or portal, secured or password-protected, specifically designed for an organization to conduct internal business. An Intranet is fully comparable to and interoperable with the Internet, but is not readily available to the public. Intranet access may be VA-wide or limited to an Administration or Program Office.

52. **IP address**: A 32 bit number that identifies each sender or receiver of information that is sent across the Internet or Intranet. An IP address has two parts: the identifier of a particular

network on the Internet or Intranet and an identifier of the particular device, which can be a server or a workstation within that network.

53. **IRIS (Inquiry Routing and Information System):** A web-based customer service tool through which the public may securely submit and route electronic inquiries via the Internet to VA's business lines, medical facilities, and other VA Offices and which tracks those inquiries until resolved. Also provides an FAQ Knowledge Base that is indexed with VA's search engine, links to VA facilities and to 800 toll free phone number information.

54. **JPEG (JPG or Joint Photographic Experts Group)**: A compressed image file format.

55. **Link:** See definition for hyperlink.

56. **Listserv:** An e-mail list delivery solution to manage electronic newsletters, discussion groups, and direct e-mail.

57. **MAC:** Media Access Control address

58. **Machine Readable format**: The formatting of web page Privacy Policy statements so they can be read by Web browsers or other applications designed to interpret machine-readable policy statements. Such technologies may then alert users automatically about whether site privacy practices match their personal privacy preferences.

59. **Major Entry Point:** Internet and Intranet web pages that are frequently accessed directly by website visitors, such as a department home page, an individual website's home page, an organization's home page, the root level below the organization's home page or any web page that website statistics indicate is most often visited or linked to by website visitors.

60. **Management Controls:** The organization, policies, and procedures used to reasonably ensure that (1) programs achieve their intended results; (2) resources are used consistent with agency mission; (3) programs and resources are protected from waste, fraud, and mismanagement; (4) laws and regulations are followed; and (5) reliable and timely information is obtained, maintained, reported and used for decision making.

61. **Metadata:** Metadata provides summary information about a file posted on-line, such as a .doc, .pdf, or .xls file. Typically, it includes several elements of HyperText Markup Language/HTML which define information about the properties of the file it describes in the same way that a library catalog card defines the elements of a book. Metadata customarily includes elements such as the name of the author of the file, the language the file is written in, the source of the file, keywords that describe the file, and the target audience for the posted content. Standardized descriptive metadata improves the precision of searches, enables enhanced field searching, permits the indexing of non-textual objects, increases the consistency of the metadata collected, enables website management through the use of version identification, effective dates and rights/permissions, determines the relevance of search results (which is indicated by the order in which retrieved items are displayed on the search results page), and provides information about the resource on the search results page. Title, description, and date metadata, when displayed on the search results page, aid the searcher in selecting the resources to view.

62. **Meta Tag:** Information inserted into the header portion of the web page that is used to communicate information about the page, for use by browsers or search engines. Typically metatags are used to redirect users to other web pages, set expiration dates, identify authors, exclude web pages from automatic search engine indexing, and provide descriptions for use by search engines.

63. **Mouseover:** A JavaScript element that triggers a change on an item (usually a graphic) in a Web page when the mouse passes over it; a term used to indicate the text that appears next to a mouse pointer when a computer mouse is held over any screen object that is an active link, or over some other graphics element that is capable of performing an action, such as an icon or command button. The change usually signifies that the item is a link to related or additional information. May also be known as a "rollover".

64. **Navigation:** The means by which a user can navigate the content of a page or site. Navigation usually consists of a collection of links to sections and subsections of a site. Often a site map is provided as an overview. Tables of contents usually list links to subsections of a site or sections of a specific document.

65. **NCA:** National Cemetery Administration

66. **OCIS (Office of Cyber and Information Security):** The VA Program Office whose mission is to ensure the privacy, confidentiality, integrity, and availability of VA information assets (hardware and software) associated with the services offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

67. **OCR (Optical Character Recognition)**: The branch of computer science that involves reading text from paper and translating the images into a form that the computer can manipulate. All OCR systems include an optical scanner for reading text and sophisticated software for reading images.

68. **OMB:** Office of Management & Budget

69. **Operational Controls:** Security methods primarily implemented and executed by people (as opposed to systems). These controls are put in place to improve the security of a particular system (or group of systems). They often involve management activities as well as technical controls.

70. **Organization and Federal Organization:** Any entity of a federal agency, at any level of the agency; for example, any department, agency, bureau, division, office, program, or other organizational unit.

71. **Page:** A text file at a single URL, written or generated in a markup language like HTML, and viewed through a browser, e.g., .pdf, .doc, .xls, but not including pop-up windows, dialog windows, files that provide text descriptions of non-text content to enhance accessibility (d-links), redirection pages, or slides within a presentation, except where otherwise noted.

72. **PDF (Portable Document Format)**: a proprietary file format created by Adobe Systems that enables complex documents to be viewed on almost any computer while retaining document formatting. Adobe Acrobat Reader is the free viewer application.

73. **Plug-in:** A program that browsers utilize to play or execute downloaded files. Some of the more popular plug-ins are RealAudio, QuickTime, Media Player and Adobe Acrobat Reader.

74**. POC (Point of Contact):** The primary individual or group to whom reports of errors or requests for technical assistance related to an Internet service can be made. A POC for Content is that person who has knowledge of the information that is being disseminated on a web page; a Technical POC is that person who has knowledge of the technical aspects of a web page, such as links, navigation, branding, etc., and other attributes that provide the framework by which to convey the information on a web page.

75. **PRA:** Paperwork Reduction Act

76. **Privacy Act:** Title 5 of the United States Code, section 552a that applies to information that VA gathers and maintains about individuals by their names or other personal identifiers (e.g., claim number, social security number). Sometimes referred to as PA.

77. **Privacy Policy:** The policy under which the organization operating a website handles the personal information collected about visitors to the site and which must conform to all mandates and requirements that govern the collection of information.

78. **Program Office:** A component of the VA organization for which a station number and/or routing symbol exists.

79. **Public Document:** Any document or information not subject to access limitations.

80. **RDF (Resource Description Framework)**: A foundation for processing metadata; it provides interoperability between applications that exchange machine-understandable information on the Web.

81. **Search Engine:** A program that searches documents for specified keywords and returns a list of the documents where the keywords were found.

82. **Secondary Document:** Additional pages containing the next level of detail and linked to the home page.

83. **Second-Level Domain Name:** A website address that is at the next highest level of the hierarchy below the top-level domains, such as va.gov.

84. **Section 508**: The section of the Rehabilitation Act that requires that any electronic information developed, procured, maintained, or used by the Federal Government must be accessible to employees and member of the public with disabilities to the extent it does not pose an "undue burden".

85. **Sensitive Information:** Information that requires protection due to the risk and magnitude of loss or harm that could result from inadvertent or deliberate disclosure, alteration, or destruction of the information. The term includes information whose improper use or disclosure could adversely affect the ability of an agency to accomplish its mission, proprietary information, records about individuals requiring protection under the Privacy Act, and information not releasable under the Freedom of Information Act.

86. **Server (Web):** Collection of computer programs that serve web files. The server provides access to one or more collections of documents using web formats and protocols. The VA uses three types of web servers as listed below:

a. Development servers are used as platforms to develop and review web pages before releasing them to the public;

b. Staging servers are used by the Technical Support Office to house files for review and scanning before moving them to the production server; and

c. Production servers contain the current files accessed by VA's websites.

87. **Site Map:** A linked, graphic or text-based display of a website's hierarchy which helps users navigate through a website that has more than one page by showing the user a diagram of the entire site's contents. Typically, site maps break down a website's content into increasingly specific subject areas to help the visitor understand its structure, from the main navigation pages to their subordinate pages. The main difference between a site map and a subject index is that a subject index is typically an alphabetical list, not a hierarchically structured set of links.

88. **SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol):** A protocol used to transfer electronic mail between computers. Most e-mail systems that send mail over the Internet use SMTP to send messages from one server to another; the messages can then be retrieved with an e-mail client.

89. **Spam:** Unsolicited e-mail on the Internet; often referred to as junk mail.

90. **SSL (Secure Socket Layer)**: Provides for encrypted transmission of information or data over the Internet. SSL works by using a private key to encrypt data that is transferred over the SSL connection. By convention, URLs that require an SSL connection start with https instead of http.

91. **Subject Index:** A list of a website's content, typically presented in alphabetical order, similar to an index in the back of a book. The main difference between a subject index and a site map is that a site map conveys website structure or navigation.

92. **System of Records:** A file, database, or program from which personal information is retrieved by name or other personal identifier of the record's subject. VA must create, populate, maintain, use and disclose information in a system of records as required by the Privacy Act.

93. **Technical Controls:** Security controls that the computer system executes to protect the system or the data on the system. The controls can provide automated protection for unauthorized access or misuse, facilitate detection of security violations, and support security requirements for applications and data.

94. **Technical Management:** Placing approved content on web pages in the proper web page formats. VA web managers must test pages to make sure that the appearance conforms to VA standards for look and feel, that there is user-friendly navigation, that all required links appear on the page, that there are no broken links, and that all mandatory requirements for Section 508 compliance, privacy, etc., are met. These mandates, requirements and recommendations are contained in the other sections of this Handbook. Content and technical managers should also consult the VA Web Best Practices Guide for additional information and guidance on templates, fonts, images, branding, logos, etc.

95**. Technical Support:** Providing services to the technical operation of a website to ensure the optimal continuing performance of the site.

96. **Thumbnail:** A miniature version of a larger graphic placed within a document to provide the user with a small version of the image, and to reduce the load time of a Web page. Usually the picture is also an anchor to another page that has the expanded graphic.

97. **URL (Uniform Resource Locator)**: the global address of documents and other resources on the World Wide Web; includes the protocol (http, ftp, telnet, etc) followed by the DNS address (e.g. http://www.va.gov).

98**. Usability:** The measure of the quality of a visitor's experience when using a website, including the ability to accomplish basic tasks.

99. **VA Internet Service Website:** An information resource established and/or maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the purpose of supporting its mission of service to veterans and their families, for whose content the Department is solely responsible and which must comply with VA internal directives.

100. **VA Web Operations:** Also known as Web Ops. Ensures the performance, availability, and security of VA's national Internet, and Intranet servers along with their associated web applications. VA Web Operations provides website and enterprise-based application hosting services for all VA facilities and programs, including the VA's primary internal (vaww.va.gov) and external (www.va.gov) sites.

101. **VA Web Registry:** The VA Web Registry is a One-VA database on which all VA websites in production must be registered and that lists all VA websites and outsourced sites that conduct business on behalf of VA. It is also the vehicle that is used to certify that all VA websites are compliant with VA mandates, including Section 508 accessibility and Privacy mandates, ensuring that VA websites have no persistent cookies (unless permitted to do so in writing by the Assistant Secretary for Information & Technology), and identifying any plug-ins necessary for using the website.

102. **VACO:** Veterans Affairs Central Office.

103. **VBA:** Veterans Benefits Administration.

104. **VHA:** Veterans Health Administration.

105. **VPN (Virtual Private Network):** A network scheme in which portions of the network are connected via the Internet, but the information sent across the Internet is encrypted. VPN can provide remote access to an organization's network via the Internet, sending data over the public Internet through secure "tunnels."

106. **W3C:** World Wide Web Consortium.

107. **Web (or The Web):** A term applied indiscriminately to the Internet/Intranet environment of services, but more appropriately applied to the client/server environment of information and services accessible by utilization of html or xml and hypertext transfer protocol.

108. **Web Application (Web-based Application):** A software program that uses HTTP for its core communication protocol and delivers web-based information to the user in the HTML language, based on user input (navigation or data input); using a website as the front-end, and transacting with a database on the back-end.

109. **Web Author:** A person responsible for developing and maintaining the content of one or more Web pages. This person may also share Webmaster functions.

110. **Web Clients:** Software applications, typically browsers that access information distributed over the Internet.

111. **Web Content Managers:** Federal employees, who write, edit, manage, and form strategic plans for the content of federal websites.

112. **Web Form:** A form on a website that enables visitors to communicate with the host by filling in the fields and submitting the information. Information received via a form can be received as public e-mail or processed through another kind of software, such as a correspondence management system.

113. **Web Page:** An individual computer file developed in accordance with HTML Web format standard, which can be addressed by a hypertext link. Documents and collections are constructed of linked pages. Web page can also refer to an entire website, including all files, graphics, etc.

114. **Web Records**: For NARA purposes, web records are those documents that document the information on the site itself. See Comply with NARA Web Records Management Requirements in the Webmaster Checklist for more details. Examples of web records are:

    a. Web content records that include the content pages that compose the site, inclusive of the HTML markup; records generated when a user interacts with a site; and if the agency chooses to document its site this way, lists of the URLs referenced by site's hyperlinks.

b. Web management and operations records that provide context to the site include: web site design records, records that specify an agency's web policies and procedures by addressing such matters as how records are selected for the site and when and how they may be removed, records documenting the use of copyrighted material on a site, records relating to the software applications used to operate the site, and records that document user access and when pages are placed on the site, updated, and/or removed.

c. Web management and operations records that provide structure related to the site that include site maps that show the directory structure into which content pages are organized and COTS software configuration files used to operate the site and establish its look and feel, including server environment configuration specifications.

115. **Webmaster:** An Internet/Intranet service administrator, who designs, publishes, manages, and maintains websites that provide a variety of information services. The Webmaster may also have primary technical responsibility for the Web server.

116. **Website (Web site):** A collection of web content organized under a single home page.

117. **Website usability:** Making web pages easy to understand, to read, and to navigate.

118. **WebXM:** A diagnostic tool with specific parameters for determining the health of VA web pages by crawling individual VA websites and analyzing content, integrity, and compliance with specific standards. WebXM scans are run automatically no less than once per month, and webmasters will be notified by VA management of any violations or anomalies found on their respective pages.

119. **World Wide Web (WWW):** A hypertext-based client/server application that guides the user to the linked collection of information that is accessible through common browsing software.

120. **XML** (**eXtensible Mark-up Language):** Acronym for which is a specification developed by the W3C. XML is a pared-down version of Standard Generalized Mark-Up Language, designed especially for Web documents. It allows designers to create their own customized tags, enabling the definition, transmission, validation, and interpretation of data between applications and between organizations.